

Edited by Peter Haining

THE BLACK MAGIC OMNIBUS

Volume 1



Peter Haining is a well-known writer and broadcaster on the supernatural and the occult. The editor of numerous collections of macabre stories, he has also written four studies of witchcraft and black magic. He is a full-time writer, is married with two children, and lives in Essex.

Also edited by Peter Haining

THE GHOULS 1

THE GHOULS 2

BLACK MAGIC 2

For my brother ROBERT
– who also likes such stories.

Edited by Peter Haining

Black Magic I

Prologue by Dennis Wheatley

Futura Publications Limited
An Orbit Book

An Orbit Book

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Part I

INTRODUCTION

Black magic—two words which are among the most evocative in modern parlance. As the theme for immensely successful films, a circulation booster for newspapers and magazines, not to mention the essence of innumerable best-selling novels, the topic has become one of enormous interest and continuing appeal throughout the world. And perhaps the very reason for its success is that so little is *really* known about it.

Popular tradition, of course, uses the term to embrace a whole variety of scarcely understood practices—viz. witchcraft, sorcery, necromancy, voodoo, etc.—yet, while all of these have elements of 'black' magic as part of their rites, it is actually a quite separate pursuit, inherently evil, inherently dangerous. It represents to those who seek its ways a means for harnessing the power of evil in one of its many forms for self-gratification. As Arthur Edward Waite, the renowned occult authority, wrote in his privately-printed and now much-sought-after work, *The Book of Black Magic* (1898), 'The desire to communicate with spirits is older than history. It connects with ineradicable principles in human nature, and the attempts to satisfy that desire have usually taken a shape which does gross outrage to reason.'

It is an enduring tradition, voluminously documented, and still very much with us today—as the late Cyril Connolly remarked only recently in *The Sunday Times*: 'Pompeian credulity still marches hand in hand with the immense advances in exact objective observation. Modern science produces the H-bomb which reproduces the heat of the sun; modern magic counters with voodoo, black mass, bone-casting, evil eyes, satanism, fortune telling, the Tarot pack, the I Ching, the Witches' Coven, the White Goddess.' It is, not surprisingly, a history of great richness, teeming with extraordinary events and still more extraordinary people; a story bristling with myth and legend, truth and half-truth, dark secrets and forbidden knowledge.

The Black Magic Omnibus is not, however, another work

claiming to reveal all the secrets of the practice as so many other books in the field have done. It is rather an *examination* of the topic, its elements, and some of those people who have featured in its history—but conducted in a rather different style. Firstly, it combines both fact and fiction: fictional stories based on established—or at least well-authenticated—facts. Secondly, its contributors are all modern writers, bringing both personal experience and knowledge, plus the results of centuries of study and reason, to bear on their subjects. In the light of twentieth-century research, it is possible, as you will read, to see even the most firmly held superstition or, conversely, the most intangible legend, in quite a new way. Thirdly, and perhaps most important of all, it is an entertainment, for only the reader whose interest is captured and whose mind is intrigued, will realize the underlying message behind each and every tale. Let me add that the book is not without its lighter moments: amusing things can happen when meddling with the black arts, and the reader should expect some tongue-in-cheek tales among the more sinister contributions.

Because of this approach, it has been thought appropriate to divide the book into two sections, the first dealing with historical black magic and a reinterpretation of some of its most famous incidents; the second half with black magic as it is being practised around the world today.

It needs to be stressed right from the outset that it is impossible to place any completely successful strictures on what is, and what is not black magic—so there will be, as you might expect, elements of witchcraft, sorcery, necromancy and so on creeping into some of the tales; they will, I suggest, help the reader towards his own definition. Nonetheless, the overall emphasis has been on stories of the ritualist's utilization of evil—and its outcome. To highlight the factual nature of the stories, I have preceded each with a quotation from such authority: in the case of Part I by statements from historians or contemporary documents, and in Part II by recent newspaper and magazine reports. To further underline the authenticity of the collection, I think a few preparatory notes on the contributors and their subjects are in order.

No collection of this kind could possibly start with anyone other than Dr. Johann Faust, the 'Father of Black Magic' whose legendary existence has formed the basis of some of the greatest works of art: Goethe's *Faust*, Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus*, Calderon's *El Magico Prodigioso*, the ballet of Heine, and innumerable other dramas and romances. Of his life we know comparatively little, except that having obtained a degree as a Doctor of Theology he took up the study of magic and through this allegedly made con-

tact with the Devil, to whom he sold his soul in return for limitless power. Much is sheer conjecture where Faust is concerned—save that he was found dead by an innkeeper in 1540, his face horribly contorted, thereby giving rise to the belief that 'the Devil had taken his own.' In our first story, the brilliantly imaginative American Roger Zelazny presents us with a quite new aspect of this strange man.

A legend almost as famous as that of Faust concerns the French magician, Gilles de Rais, the 'Bluebeard' of tradition, whose terrible occult experiments in the tower of his Breton castle led to his execution at the stake in Nantes. Perhaps more genuinely evil than any other figure in the history of black magic, Gilles de Rais slaughtered many hundreds of children in order to use their blood in sex rites and in the evocation of the Devil. The many elements in the life of this handsome, debauched nobleman with his blue-black beard, have proved a rich source for story-tellers, but I doubt if anyone has used the story of his strange 'disappearance' more ingeniously than Doris Pitkin Buck in *Transgressor's Way*.

The third of our triumvirate of early historical figures is Cesare Borgia, whose name is also synonymous with evil and debauchery. Much has been rumoured of this powerful Italian prince and his family and the manner in which they employed the forces of evil in their quest for self-gratification. In *Lesandro's Familiar* August Derleth vividly shows that those who employ the spirits of darkness should not be surprised if the tables are sometimes turned against them.

The history of black magic is full of vague hints and rumours about famous people having been secretly involved in evil practices, and none, in my opinion, gives rise to a more fascinating matter for speculation than the story that Oliver Cromwell, the feared Lord Protector of England, was a Satanist. Strangely, generations of historians have looked at this intriguing rumour, but to date none has offered more than a short essay or passing reference to it.* Manly Wade Wellman, the distinguished American fantasist, is certainly the first writer of fiction to ponder on the story, and his tale, *The Liers in Wait*, contributes interesting food for thought to the controversy.

The story which follows, *Is the Devil a Gentleman?* by Seabury Quinn, asks an intriguing question about American witchcraft at much the same period. The confessions of those involved in the Salem Witch Trials seem to point to self-induced

* I am, however, currently engaged in researching the available papers and documents relating to Cromwell and Satanism with a view to publishing a book on the subject in due course.—*The Editor*.

hysteria rather than actual witchcraft; but, say later reports, there probably *was* magic of a kind being practised there, and elsewhere in the New World, in the pioneer days. Quinn, a New Englander deeply versed in the occult and old traditions, takes up the idea with startling effect. The third story in this group, by the English writer Margaret Irwin, puts flesh on those skeletal rumours from the Middle Ages onwards that many of the French nobility have been dabblers in the black arts.

The next group of stories takes three other famous historical figures whose magical connections are rather more clearly established: the Pied Piper of Hamelin, now seen in many German eyes as not the gentle entertainer of small children, but the personification of evil luring away the unwary; the Marquis de Sade, whose powers of seduction owed much to his occult knowledge; and the famous Count Cagliostro, whose magical armoury included a mirror said to possess the ability to reveal the future. The respective tales by Eric Frank Russell, Jerome Bixby and Robert Arthur add further interest to these well-known legends.

Aleister Crowley, who follows Robert Arthur's story of Cagliostro, 'bridges the gap between ancient and modern magic,' as more than one authority has noted. His quest for the secrets of black magic at the turn of the century threw the whole topic into sharp focus once again, and played no little part in the current enormous interest in the matter. Crowley, 'The Great Beast' and 'The Master Therion' as he liked to call himself, was an undoubted adept in black magic, and believed himself to be a reincarnation of both Cagliostro and Eliphas Levi, another French magician of the late nineteenth century. His life and exploits are now being widely studied and there can be few better insights into his character and convictions than *The Dream Circean*, which is here anthologized for the first time since its original publication in Crowley's self-financed magazine *The Equinox*, published briefly in the early years of this century.

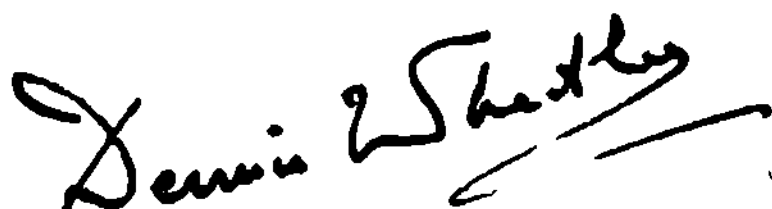
Secret magical societies blossomed throughout Europe and America in the wake of men like Crowley, and M. P. Shiel adopts this subject in *The Primate of the Rose*. Shiel, who like Crowley adored grandiose titles and was known as 'The Duke of Redonda' (he was actually the owner of a small West Indian island of that name and—perfectly legitimately—handed out similar titles to his friends), lived close to the underworld of London occultism and no doubt was more than casually acquainted with organizations of the kind he writes about in his story.

H. P. Lovecraft must always have a place in any work on black magic, and there are an increasing number of experts who believe

that this mysterious American's knowledge of the occult went far deeper than the mere creation of fanciful stories. His work seems to foreshadow an invasion of our lives by forces held in check since the dawn of time, and behind his often overly-exotic descriptions lies a profound familiarity with mythology and legend. His contribution, *Witches' Hollow*, deals with that popular figure of rural tradition, the wizard, and hints at darker powers than those usually attributed to these country 'medicine men.' Like Lovecraft, Shirley Jackson has been credited with exhaustive knowledge of her subject matter, and apart from rather light-heartedly numbering 'black magic' among her hobbies, has more than once been called a 'practising witch.' How she came by such intimate knowledge of the daemon lover of her story must be left to the reader's imagination!

Part I ends with stories by two of our greatest living fantasists, Ursula LeGuin and Fritz Leiber, both dealing with the continuing influence of magic over our lives. Miss LeGuin takes a look at the growing interest of academics in black magic—and where their involvement might lead them; Fritz Leiber, for his part, demonstrates how fear of the black arts can still influence us even in the heart of the most sophisticated city. Both writers by way of their fiction have played a major role in helping us to rationalize out attitudes towards black magic and to seek some explanation for its power outside simple superstition and fear. Their stories are a splendid preparation for the survey of black magic around the world today which is conducted in Part II of the collection.

PETER HAINING

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Dennis Wheatley". The signature is stylized with a large, looping "D" and a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

PROLOGUE

As a young officer in the 1914-18 war, while convalescing, I played a lot of *vingt-et-un*. After one ten-hour session, having become bored from drawing few cards worth betting upon, on the bank passing to me, I called on the Devil to give me luck. I drew two aces, doubled the table, drew another ace, split three times and finished with two naturals and a five and under. Everyone paid me sixteen times his original stake.

That shook the other chaps at the table; but it shook me infinitely more, as, sooner or later, that sort of 'luck' has to be paid for.

I have never prayed to the Devil since. Neither have I ever attended any form of magical ceremony or a seance. It is obviously such a fascinating game that even the strongest-willed person could easily get drawn further and further into it until—well, there are several very real dangers. The least is that one might find oneself being blackmailed for taking part in obscene practices. The worst, failure to pull out in time, with the realization that one has imperilled one's immortal soul. There is also the risk of slipping up in some ritual, with consequent failure to keep under control the forces one has called up. The result of that used to be called demonic possession. It is now classed as lunacy. One of Aleister Crowley's occult 'operations' misfired; so that he was found next morning a gibbering idiot, and had to spend six months in an asylum.

By prayer, fasting and mortification of the flesh, the Saints called down power in order that they might perform miracles to the glorification of God, and heal the sick. This, the use of Supernatural Power for good or *unselfish ends*, is WHITE MAGIC.

The use of Supernatural Power for wicked or *selfish ends* is BLACK MAGIC. Such magic is of the Devil and can be obtained only by sexual depravity and bestial rites.

A MAGICIAN'S PACT WITH THE DEVIL

'I, Johann Faustus, doctor, do openly acknowledge with mine own hand, to the great force and strengthening of this letter, that since I began to study, and speculate the course and nature of the elements, I have not found, through the gift that is given me from above, any such learning and wisdom that can bring me to my desire, and for that I find that men are unable to instruct me any farther in the matter; now have I, Doctor Faustus, to the hellish prince of Orient, and his messenger, Mephistopheles, given both my body and soul, upon such conditions, that they shall learn me, and fulfil my desires in all things, as they have promised and vowed unto me, with due obedience to me, according to the articles mentioned between us.

Farther, I do Covenant and Grant with them by these presents that at the end of twenty-four years next ensuing the date of this present letter, they being expired, and I in the meantime, during the said years, be served of them at my will, they accomplishing my desires to the full in all points as we are agreed: that then I give to them all the power to do with me at their pleasure, to rule, to send, fetch or carry, me or mine, be it either body, soul, flesh, blood or goods, into their habitation, be it wheresoever: and hereupon I defie God and his Christ, all the Host of Heaven, and all living creatures that bear the shape of God: yea, all that live: And again I say it, and it shall be so, and to the more strengthening of this writing, I have written it with my own hand and blood, being in perfect memory: and hereupon I subscribe to it with my name and title, calling all the infernal, middle and supreme powers to witness of this my letter and subscription.'

JOHANN FAUSTUS

The Salvation of Faust

ROGER ZELAZNY

The cursed bells of Orgy-time are ringing. My words begin to stir upon the page.

Blinking clear I see that the paper is moist.

A strange taste to the wine, a tainted perfume in the hangings, and Helen snoring gently . . .

I rise. I cross to the window and look outside.

The animals are enjoying themselves.

They look like me. They walk and talk like me. But they are animals. *Animale post coitum triste est* is not always the case. They are happy.

Sporting about the great pole, and unashamed upon the village green, indeed they are happy animals. Repeatedly so.

The bells!

I should give anything I possess to join them there!

But they disgust me.

. . . Helen?

No. No solace today. For, verily, I am *triste*.

The wine. Their wine is tapped so early in the morning! Blessed drunkenness inundates the countryside. My wine is tainted, however.

I am damned.

'My god, my god—why hast thou forsaken me?'

'Faustus?'

'Helen?'

'Come to me.'

I kiss her with the tenderness of the strange feeling I have known these past months.

'Why?'

'Why what, my dear?'

'Why must you treat me as you do?'

'I have no word for the feeling.'

The tears of Helen upon the counterpane, drops of misery upon my hands.

'Why are you not like the others?'

I stare across the room. Each peal of the Orgy bell rattles upon the walls of flesh, the bars of bone.

'I traded something very precious, my dear, for all that I possess.'

'What?'

'I have no word for it.'

I return to the balcony and throw a handful of gold coins to the beggars who crouch by the gate, torn between their desire for alms and the lecherous cries of their sagging flesh. Let both be answered.

Let them begone!

My eyes fall upon the dagger, the ceremonial dagger I had used in the rituals. If only I had the strength, the will . . .

But something, I do not understand what, cries out within me, 'Do not! It is a—'

—I have no word for the concept.

'Wagner!'

A sudden resolution. A pathetic entreaty.

An attempt . . .

'You called, master?'

'Yes, Wagner. Set up the north room. Today I shall conjure.'

His freckled face drops. A sniff emerges from his snub nose.

'Hurry. Set things up. Then you may join them on the green.'

He brightens. He bows. He never bowed before, but I have changed, and people fear me now.

'Helen, my dearest, I go to put on my robes. Perhaps I shall be a different man when I return.'

She breathes heavily, she squirms upon the bed.

'Oh, do! Please!'

Her animal passions both attract and repel me now. Oh damnation! That I had never tampered with things forbidden! For mere wealth, knowledge, power . . . This!

Down my long halls, and through the glittering vistas of crystal, of marble. Of painted canvas. The thousand statues of my palace are crying.

'Hold! Save us, Faustus! Do not go back! We will grow ugly . . .'

'I am sorry, beauty,' I answer, 'but you are not enough. I must fight to recover what once was mine.'

I pass on, and something is sobbing behind me.

The north room wears black, and the Circle is drawn. The

candles whip the shadows with lashes of light. The walls are carousel, Wagner's eyes, and pleading.

'Well set. Go thy ways, Wagner. Enjoy the day, thy youth . . .'

My voice breaks, but he is already gone.

The black robes disgust me also. It is repugnant to traffic thus—why, I do not know.

'Gather, darkness!'

The heaviness is upon me. Contact already—rapport soon.

'Great hornèd one, I summon thee, from the depths . . .'

Each candle is a bonfire.

Light without illumination.

Darkness visible . . .

'By all the great names, I charge thee, appear before me . . .'

He is here, and my limbs are leaden.

Two eyes flickering, unblinking, from a pillar of absolute darkness.

'Faustus, you have called.'

'Yes, great hornèd one, Lord of the Festival, I have summoned thee, upon this, thy day.'

'What do you wish?'

'An end to the bargain.'

'Why?'

'I wish to be like the others once more. I am sorry I made the pact. Take back everything you have given me! Make me like the poorest beggar at my gate, but return me to what I was!'

'Faustus. Faustus. Faustus. Three times do I speak thy name in pity. It is no longer as I will, or as thou willest, but as it is willed.'

My head swimming, my knees buckling. I step forward and break the Circle.

'Then consume me. I no longer wish to live.'

The pillar sways.

'I cannot Faustus. Thy destiny is thy own.'

'Why? What have I done that makes me so special, that sets me so apart?'

'You have accepted a soul in return for your lust to live, to know.'

'What is a soul?'

'I do not know. But it was a part of the pact, and there are conditions upon this world which I must observe. You are eternally, irrevocably saved.'

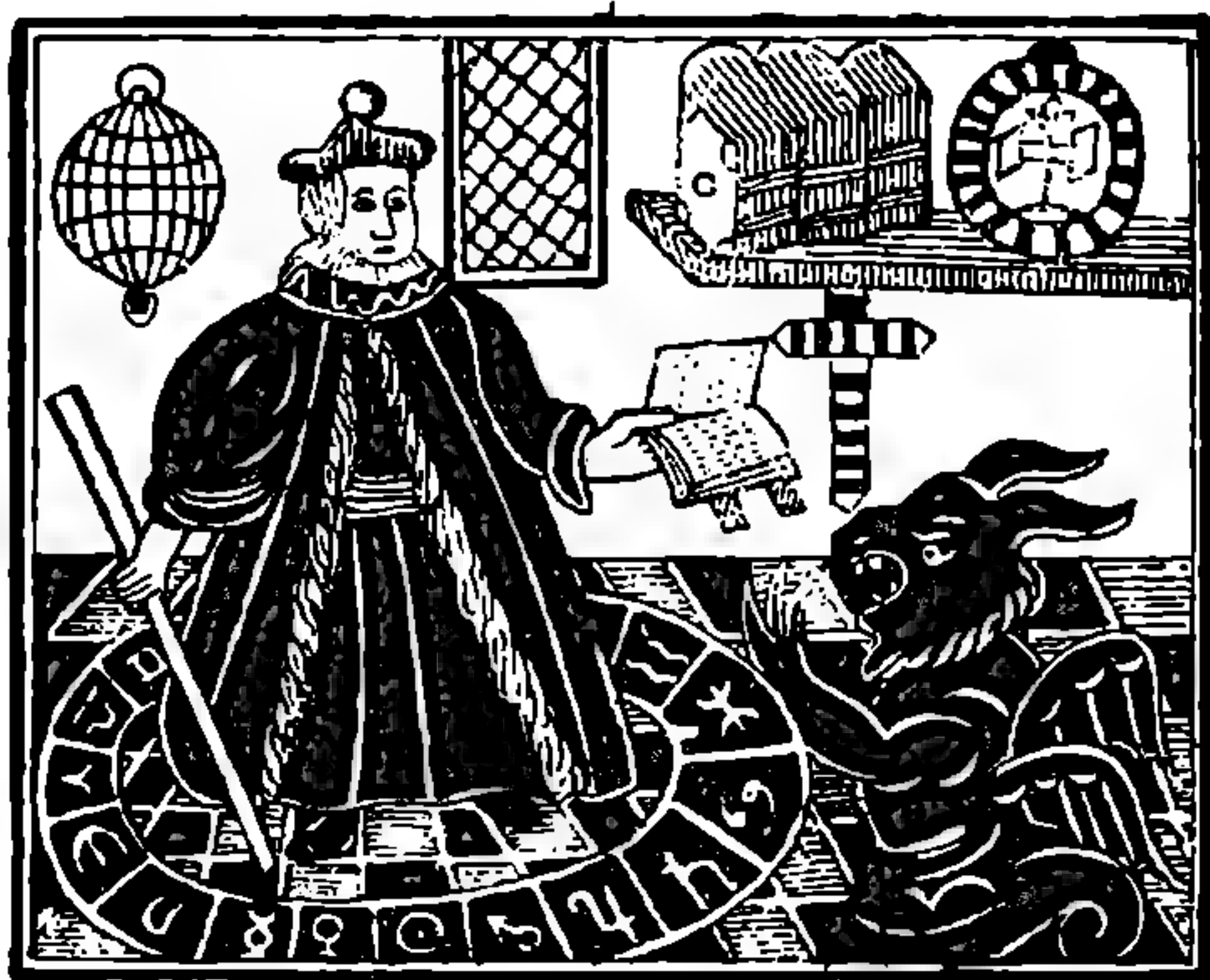
'Is there nothing I can do?'

'Nothing.'

Heavier and heavier the robes.

'Then begone, great one. You were a good god, but I have been twisted inside. I must seek me another now, for strange things trouble me.'

'Good-bye, gentle Faustus--most unhappy of men.'
The emptied walls spin carousel. Around and around.
The great green sun grinds on. For ever, and ever.
The cursed bells of Orgytime are ringing!
And I in the centre, alone.



TO INVOKE A SPIRIT FOR RICHES

'Such a thing will only be doubted by people who have entrenched themselves in prejudice and who deny that such compacts can be made. First, set out the magical circle as here shown :



all the while pronouncing, "Made strong against all evil spirits and devils." The triangle in the centre must be formed of three chains taken from the gibbet and nailed down with those nails that have gone through the foreheads of executed criminals who were broken upon the wheel. Then address yourself to God with holy prayers, which have to be said in great devotion, but are intermingled with exclamations "Yn ge tu Y ge sy San mim ta chu." Then pronounce a curse over Satan thus : "Hound of Hell, Spirit, precipitated in the abyss of eternal damnation, see me standing courageously amidst the hordes of devilish furies." Three times must he be cursed before he will fulfil your commands. Finally with horrid expressions send him away. When you have taken possession of the money and the jewels, and Lucifer is gone, then thank God with a psalm. With all your possessions go to another country.'

From an ancient French manuscript said to have been found among papers belonging to Gilles de Rais — 'Bluebeard'.

Transgressor's Way

DORIS PITKIN BUCK

He rode by the rose hedge thinking: With any luck the day should hold an adventure. Adventures meant pretty girls. His mind's eye saw one, sugar-sweet with smiles, blonde hair brightened with a hint of ginger. Prettygirl his mind sang—one word. The breeze was heady. The breeze was languorous. Roses teased, hiding their thorns.

Experience had taught the chevalier so thick a hedge must screen sights of interest. His thoughts turned loveward with a rush of tenderness. He felt born to kiss maidens on the lips and cuddle dainty waists. A lovely, melty, prone-in-the-grass-and-flowers feeling.

But there was still the hedge. He poked it with his scabbard. Presently, he'd cleared a peephole. Straight before him jetted a fountain. It subsided. It shot up again. And on her knees beside it, about to wash the great gold braid of her hair, rested the prettygirl.

His feet slipped by themselves from the stirrups. He reconnoitered the length of the hedge. For more than a decade he had assumed hedges were created for their gaps. This was an exception, sturdy as a wall built by Romans, forbidding as a range of snow-glistening mountains, matted twig over thorned twig like hairs in a witch's comb.

But he was no whit discouraged, with warm wind petting his cheek and filling his nostrils with perfume. Though life had held disappointments, though he had learned to step warily, surely today would make up for cautions and subterfuges, for moves planned like chess, for promises leading to promises, for explanations he hoped were believed — all these so foreign to an ardent temperament. But the month of June understood him, brain, heart, and flesh.

'Hist!'

He had known it would be a good day. He had instincts about such things.

'Good sir,' a voice came from the other side of the roses, the words in country patois. Clearly a serving maid. Presumably venal. 'What shall be my reward if I show you to my lady?'

Splendid. He took stock of what he had upon him. Halfway to his waist hung a gold chain. His fingers inside his hawking gauntlets were ringed with some magnificence. His belt, embroidered in fine thread, showed here and there a pearl. Coral and turquoise were sewn onto his gauntlet cuffs. They ornamented the hilt of his good sword Filibert.

He heard a giggle. 'My mistress, she's known as Willing Mind.'

So far, so good. 'Catch,' he whispered, flipping a bejewelled gauntlet over the hedge.

'My lord is generous.'

'She's still by the fountain?'

'Still by the fountain and naked now as Eve in Paradise.'

His breath caught. 'How reach her?'

The maid whispered, 'There's a passage fit for moles under the hedge. It begins in about twelve of your paces, under a green stone. Pry the slab up with your scabbard.'

The girl sat under a bough, her body dappled with shade and light as she dipped her pink foot in the fountain, drew it back from the chill, ventured it in again, and shook out her hair. The temperature of the water interested her little as he shortened the distance between them, marking each step with a garment flung on the greensward.

'Here is thy Adam, sweet Eve,' he cried.

Her eyes, blue like finest turquoise, took in his face, figure, and haste. Her rounded chin drooped a little toward her shoulder. She made an effort, a slight one, to shroud herself in the soft cloud of her hair before her expression froze into horror. To him such an expression had but one meaning. She had parents. These parents were upon them like the Philistines on Sampson.

The mother of Willing Mind let out a shriek though no one had laid a finger to her. That was, however, far less sinister than the noise her father made—an effort to force out words that resulted in something like a turkey's gobble.

Opposite the parents from somewhere Willing Mind's brothers appeared. They could only be brothers. 'Sons of a son of a mackerel,' the chevalier muttered under his breath. He glanced about.

The maid was stuffing his gauntlet into some pocket of her grease-stained apron. In any case, she would have been no help.

The light glinting from Filibert's scabbard seemed farther away than a star. No profit in making a rush for his weapon, particularly with brothers in the immediate foreground.

He sparred for time. Stepping with stately grace to a small tree, he broke off the entire top. This, with distinguished courtliness he placed where it would do most good for Willing Mind's modesty. He snatched a branch from over her head—by good fortune the bough snapped easily—and held it before him. He waited.

The end came swiftly. 'Bertrand, how sweet they look!' Willing Mind's mother stepped toward her spouse and smiled into his scowl. He stared down at her in bafflement. The lover had himself found women baffling. Each man sensed a bond with the other.

At this turn in his affairs, the chevalier sank on one knee, still holding the branch in modesty before him. 'The beauty of your daughter was like unto strong wine in my blood. Would you, good sir,' but he spoke to the dame, 'wish a cold-blooded man to marry into your family?'

At that open-sesame of a word, *marry*, the lady mother gurgled, 'Aren't they a picture?'

'Your daughter will be chatelaine of many an acre betwixt Blerancourt and Noyon. And,' with quiet emphasis, 'not a foot is mortgaged.'

'But,' objected the tallest of the brothers, 'we have heard nothing yet of this fellow's family. Is he of noble enough blood to espouse our sister?'

'Know you,' the naked lord sprang to his feet, 'that I am on my mother's side descended from the Emperor Charlemagne.'

'That could be true.' Her father tapped his chin.

While the family looked at each other, the descendant added, 'The Abbot of Ferronde is my godfather. He brought me up in the odour of sanctity when my parents, God rest their souls, passed to a better world. Happy would I be to lead Wi—to lead this virgin to his high altar and let the church join us twain in holy wedlock.'

Wedlock, for a variety of reasons, had been far that morning from the chevalier's intent. But no man should be inflexible, particularly one clothed in nothing more than a cornel bough. With a wide gesture of his free arm he declared, 'I shall leave with you, fair sir, to prove the sincerity of my intent, that chain of fine gold from which hangs the amethyst cross my grandsire wore to the First Crusade.' He pointed directly.

He felt a reaction in his favour. As he pulled rings from his fingers and slipped them on the brothers', he sensed a further softening. He concealed a certain sadness as he said,

'Of your graciousness, young squire, set this pearl on your hand. Here is silver, sir, but in its scrollwork glint many fair rubies.' The next jewels, a veritable mountain of opals, he pressed on the third brother. 'This turquoise and ivory for you.' He added a warm smile for the fourth.

'Indeed, our sister could do worse.' The general opinion.

'Will you now grant me the maiden's hand? Her beauty alone will be sufficient dower.'

'Swear to that,' her father demanded.

'By sugar and ginger—' It popped into his mind.

'Call you that a respectable oath?'

'To me those are words of power.'

'Hmm.'

Even Willing Mind's mother wavered in her obvious partiality.

Frowning, yielding to their coolness, the young man gave his next words the sound of a mighty invocation, 'By the soft breast of a dove—'

Willing Mind's father scowled blackly. 'Swear by your own beard and by your head along with it.'

'I do so swear.' The wooer tugged at his beard.

'Frank and fair,' declared the elder man, relaxing, 'especially with the stones weighing in your favour.'

The future son-in-law smiled, a slightly worried smile. They let this pass. The mother went so far as to say, 'We may well be lucky, however informal this gentleman's approaches.' As she spoke, she and the maid were managing to attire Willing Mind in silks and tissue of silver fit for a bridal. How they contrived this so rapidly was to the chevalier a mystery as great as any told at the abbey.

After that a scrivener was called, for the situation required a certain formality.

Then the brothers broke into a jig, crying, 'Visits, a fresh castle for visits.'

'My *home* is but small—'

'No matter. No matter.'

'Hardly larger than a manor—'

'We can sleep before the fire.'

'My wife and I would prefer to return here—to the scene of our romance,' he added hastily.

Nothing was definite as they left in a flurry of *God-be-with-ye's*.

The bridegroom set Willing Mind, all smiles and radiance, behind him on his charger. In due time they reached the Abbey of

Ferronde. They had been seen from afar, and the Abbot stood under the portal to greet them.

'Dear father,' the young man called as he swung Willing Mind to the ground, 'we have had but a civil marriage, subscribed to by a clerk. Join our hands before your high altar with all the rites of the church.'

'What? Again?' the Abbot questioned in the mild voice of an elderly man. 'Are you sure, my son, that your other brides have all passed to their reward?'

'Brides?' An incredulous glance met the Abbot's. 'In truth, dear father, you married me once before, but my beloved Aude now beholds me from the gold ramparts of Heaven.' He rolled his eyes upward. 'Any rumours you may have heard deal with lemans who—Let me not mince words even with a holy man. Both of us know that some women can hardly be plucked off a man's belt.' His open, agreeable smile took in practically the whole abbey as well as his bride. She was weeping onto her clenched fists and threatening him with her brothers.

'My heart misgives me,' the Abbot declared.

'His promise. His sacred promise. He promised before everybody to marry me,' Willing Mind sobbed. In her emotion she held her husband's hand so tensely her nails drew blood.

'The others,' he gulped, 'no wives at all. I swear by the hilt of Filibert. Trollops, the lot of them. This lady is my one, my lawful spouse.'

'Then, Bluebeard,' the Abbot used the nickname tenderly, for he had always been fond of his handsome godson, 'follow me into the abbey church.'

All the way home, a good ten miles by the highroad to which they kept on account of the steed, Willing Mind carolled as if Yuletide fell in June. Between songs she inquired, 'How comes it the Abbot knows so much—or so little—of your affairs?' Again, this time on the back of his neck, her husband felt her small nails italicizing her speech.

Between hemming and hawing, Bluebeard managed, 'Servants, you know servants. Or your mother does, you dear little thing. Across the fields and over the stiles—a mere two miles. What's two miles to a rumour? But ten miles by road is formidable to an older man. He seldom comes to my castle. So, what with my natural reserve and the distance, my godfather is but little acquainted with my situation.'

She bit playfully where the chain used to circle his neck. 'Your past life's nothing,' she crooned, covering the bite with kisses.

Whether by servants or not, word of their arrival travelled fast. The seneschal, the cook, the turnspit, two grooms, an outrider, the gardener, the gardener's boy, three pages, the gamekeeper and six chambermaids crowded the castle steps. 'Welcome, my lord. Welcome, my lady.'

'Our home. Our home,' Willing Mind cooed as Bluebeard lifted her over the threshold. He stepped into the great hall. His eyes widened. They grew immense. He dropped Willing Mind to the floor, where she crouched, tense and a little formidable. 'Sugar and Ginger, back to your tower! Back—all of you!' His horrified glance skipped from Aude to Clothilde, from Clothilde to Carolissa, past Lynette to Alisoun and finally rested on Dorigen before it went back again over the six, the ladies he had left recently after giving each one a blue-black hair from his beard as a keepsake. Some, he saw, had dressed in finery, some in simple kirtles. But each on her fourth finger wore the band of gold he had given her. In the midst of this fair flock, stood the Lord Abbot. Had he not been great in the church, a man of vast control, his eyes would have brimmed with tears.

'My son, I trusted you.'

'If you trusted me, was it necessary to come to my castle, unlock the towers I keep shut—for the happiness of all—and devise this welcome?'

Carolissa was stamping a foot no bigger than a small child's hand. 'You insisted—you did, you insisted, you did—that our nuptials take place in Toulouse. Now I see why.' She tried to rush at Bluebeard. It took four strong men to hold her.

'When you told me—and I so trusting after our marriage at Aix—when you declared the Duke of Burgundy might appear . . . with an army . . . at any moment, and you had to lock me into that . . . that tower . . . for my safety . . .' It was Lynette, screeching like a storm wind, weeping enough tears to float Noah and his Ark as she rolled up her sleeves.

'Where is the silver and ruby ring I gave you in Provence—the gems I traded for,' Dorigen spat the words, 'for this.' Her eyes narrowed. She tore her wedding band from her finger, flinging it at Bluebeard. It struck his chin with unexpected precision. 'For you and your stinking tower I left Avignon, beautiful Avignon. I believed everything you told me about staying night and day in that turret. I even believed I was happy.' She was tall. She twisted with such fury that her black hair whipped about her like snakes.

'Dorigen, my own Dove's Breast—'

'Call *her* love names and I'll set fire to tapestry and table, stool and larder.' From Willing Mind.

'Ladies, spare us.' The Abbot's hands were over his ears. He kept them there while Aude and Lynette, Carolissa, Alisoun, Clothilde and Dorigen grabbed for any part of Bluebeard's anatomy. He dodged. They shrieked of pearls, opals, maidenheads, sapphires, pure gold, and the lust of a goat.

'We — none of us — had the least idea anyone else was here. Fools' paradise!' They sobbed. They yelped. 'At him! At him!'

The servants started to give notice.

With a speed born of horror, the Abbot got Bluebeard into a chamber and bolted the door, fortunately very massive. As an extra precaution, the churchman leaned his own considerable bulk against it. 'The way of the transgressor,' he gasped, 'is hard.'

'I repent,' Bluebeard shouted over the din. 'Where do I do it?'

'I advise an ocean . . . between you and your wives.'

'Ocean?'

'Ocean. Northmen adventuring close to the rim of the world, have by reliable report found a new country—Vineland the something or other. Never mind. And don't interrupt. Get out by the window before your chatelaines knock the door down. They will. I should like to prevent murder if I can.' The old man raised his hand for silence. 'Never mind what you intended to say about your reputation. It could hardly be much worse.'

'But poor little Willing—'

'Poor nothing. Every single one of those women is—I wish I could do something, but now it's impossible. Hurry! before they block the outer gates. They will, you know. On your journey think how consequences wait to entrap the deceitful, how no subterfuges protect from the justice God has built into His universe. But I preach again.'

'An occupational hazard, dear father,' Bluebeard answered, though by now his hair stood upright on his head.

The Abbot saw Bluebeard's fingers on the window ledge. Horrendous and confusing sounds came from the hall. 'They won't start on each other, my son, till they're sure you've gone.' With relief he noted his godson already headed toward Scandinavia.

The Abbot raised a hanging which, if he remembered rightly, concealed a passage. He thought it led to the peace and quiet of the dungeons. He would have gone out the window after his godson, but he lacked the agility.

He heard wood riven apart, noises that suggested a battering ram, metal rasping against metal. 'Bluebeard! Bluebeard! Bluebeard!' Each cry came shriller, more furious than the one before.

The churchman hurried into thickest darkness, thinking it en-

tirely possible one wife could survive. He saw her holding the blood-stained keys of all the towers in a delicate hand. He suspected which wife it would be.



Lesandro's Familiar

AUGUST DERLETH

In the middle of that morning, the troops of the Prince Cardinal Cesare Borgia arrived at the wide plain before the walled city of Celsina. Celsina was not impregnable, but it was known to be the abode of one Messer Lesandro, not ill-called *The Fox*, by profession a mage, by position actual ruler of Celsina in the absence of the Principessa Giuliana di Marvezzi, who was cousin to Duke Oro di Orsini; these both doubtless in tacit support of Lesandro's stewardship.

It was necessary that Celsina be taken without assault, for it lay in the direct path of the troops to Parallo, where Oro di Orsini was encamped with his *condottieri*, the objective of the Borgia's campaign. Methods of warfare must be discarded not because Cesare had no quarrel with the Principessa di Mervezzi, but, though she was a cousin of Orsini, who had raised his standards against the banner of the Bull, she was also related too closely to the house of Medici, and it was not fitting that any affront be offered to the Florentines on this occasion. Now Cesare well knew that the attitude of Messer Lesandro would have been dictated by Orsini, and it was better for the nonce to pause and prevent the Fox from opposing the Borgia standards. So the troops encamped there on the plain, and Cesare retired to a hill to give adequate thought to the problem of making Celsina accessible without battle.

Apart from his desire to obtain the freedom of the city—this being necessary in order to prevent any surprise movement from the rear after his troops marched ahead on Orsini in Parallo—Cesare also held close a desire for the settlement of an old score with the magician, who had, a space some twelve-month back, cruelly tortured to death three envoys from Rome, among them the brother of a captain under the banner of the Bull. He

felt it necessary to bring about not only the quiet entrance to Celsina, but also the death of Lesandro, without giving Orsini, and, more important, the Principessa di Marvezzi, cause for suspicion and anger.

But one thing loomed above lesser obstacles, and that was Messer Lesandro's profession. The Prince Borgia was not eager to encounter magic without weapons of a like nature at his command. Pondering this, he bethought himself of one Paolo Vincelli, a youth within his ranks who professed to be a student of all things beyond the understanding of man, and presently, considering the youth, Cesare sent for him.

He came, a slim, dark soldier, not yet thirty, yet not without age in his eyes and the aloof curve of his lips and brows.

'Your Highness sent for me?'

'Be seated. Messer Vincelli, it comes to me that you are skilled in the black art.'

The youth deprecated gently.

Wasting no words, Cesare explained to the young magician what problem occupied his mind. Then for some time both sat in thoughtful silence.

'I have heard of this Lesandro,' said Vincelli presently, 'and I am not afraid to deal with him. But we must first have entrance to the city, lest he confound me with spells before the gates.'

'I have observed some time back the passage of various travellers on the roads to Celsina, and it has seemed to me, that we might well so enter the city, by skirting the enclosing hills and approaching Celsina from the direction of Parallo, arriving at the gates at nightfall. There is doubtless a password in use of which you may know.'

Cesare nodded. 'Yes, it is Orsini.'

'Orsini, then. We shall arrive at nightfall. You shall be garbed as a friar, and I as your barber. In that manner we will gain entrance to the city. Entrance to the Palazzo Marvezzi where Lesandro is must be gained by you.'

'As a friar from Francesco—it is well known that the Cardinal Orsini stands behind Oro; and he would use a friar, would he not?' said Cesare.

The arrangement agreed upon, the two returned to their quarters, Cesare to rid himself of his moustache and to brown his face, Vincelli to demean himself according to the habit of the profession he must assume.

In that afternoon and evening, events took place as Vincelli had foreseen, and presently the two of them stood in the darkness

before the Palazzo Marvezzi, where Cesare humbly, as befitted his calling, accosted a guard.

'Orsini,' he whispered. 'We come from Parallo, and must have immediate audience with Lesandro.'

The guard looked doubtful, but said, 'Wait here,' and turned to consult his superior officer, who stood before the great double doors themselves. This man in turn eyed them, said something in an undertone to the guard, and disappeared within the palace. The guard returned.

'It will be seen to,' he said.

They waited.

Presently the second guard returned, nodded briefly to his companion, and held open the door. 'Messer Lesandro will see you,' he said.

Turning before them then, he led the way into the palace, up a broad flight of stairs and down a corridor to a door at its end. There he paused, saying, 'He is within.'

Cesare nodded confidently. 'Convey my barber to the lackeys' quarters until I am ready again,' he said.

Then he opened the door and entered the room.

It was a long, dark room, with a low ceiling and so overhung with draperies that it seemed shapeless amid overbearing shadows pressing inward from its walls. At a massive table near its far end sat Messer Lesandro, an incredibly aged man, whose long beard was still faintly streaked with black. He turned dark, brooding eyes on Cesare but said not a word.

'I am come from Parallo, from Di Orsini,' said Cesare.

In a voice so pleasant that it was sinister, the magician interrupted him, 'I am honoured by a visit from Your Highness.'

At the same moment he raised a handglass from the table and turned it toward Cesare. The Prince Borgia saw reflected in the glass not himself as a disguised friar, but in all his cardinal's robes, with the insignia of the house of Borgia fluttering from his cap.

'A mirror like mine is a fortunate possession,' said the mage.

Immediately Cesare dropped his pose, flung back his hood, and said harshly, 'Well done, Lesandro. We are understood.'

'I understand your plans, yes. Even now your mage, Vincelli, is hemmed about by such terrors as I have seen fit to throw about him. A poor creature to bring along to accomplish my death! You are a fool to venture into my presence with such as he to serve you.'

'Men have died for saying less than that to me,' said Cesare gratingly.

'Mere men,' murmured the mage, in no manner disturbed, and added, ominously, 'There is small likelihood of your returning to

your camp this night.' It was as if he had said there was no likelihood of the Prince Borgia's leaving the house alive.

It was borne in upon Cesare then that he was in exceedingly great danger, though this did not unduly disturb him, since he had often been in danger of his life before this. His first impulse was to draw his blade from beneath his habit and run Lesandro through, but he thought better of it and decided to wait for the wizard's next move.

This came presently, with terrifying effect.

From the corner of his mouth, Messer Lesandro spoke a blasphemous word. Instantly came an answer, but it was not in sound. It came instead in movement, first a barely perceptible stirring of the shadows beyond the bent figure of the mage, then a billowing upward, as of smoke, and finally a coming together of darkness and nameless shadows. Then a blasphemous monstrosity stood behind Lesandro, a huge, misshapen entity bent against the low ceiling above the mage; about it was an ominous atmosphere of waiting.

Cesare looked his amazement.

'My familiar,' said Lesandro mockingly. 'He has served me long and well, and another before me. He waits now for my command.' He smiled bleakly, and for a moment his eyes flamed. Then he turned to the thing behind him and spoke to it. 'There is in the quarters of the lackeys a soldier calling himself Vincelli, and now habited as a barber. I wish him to die.'

In a flash the monstrosity had vanished, passing Cesare like a small wind.

Conquering his momentary horror, Cesare leaped to the table, seized the hour-glass that stood upon it, and raised his arm to strike Lesandro down. But in midair his arm was paralyzed, and his legs as well, so that he stood there before the mage as if graven in stone.

Yet Lesandro had not moved. Now he sat smiling, his eyes seeing Cesare and yet beyond him, and he said slowly, 'For that you will die a thousand deaths. There is a means at hand for me to summon demons from the nethermost regions, and these are accomplished at torture.'

For the first time then, Lesandro rose. He went into the shadows of the room and came back presently with a brazier, from which pale green smoke ascended. For a moment only his eyes glowed redly through the smoke and his teeth shone through his beard as he laughed at Cesare.

'Spare the barber,' said Cesare then.

'I am not given to mercy, Your Highness,' scoffed the mage.

'What holds me here?' demanded Cesare.

The magician shrugged. 'A little magic, but chiefly power from my will. Be patient.'

Abruptly the wizard raised his head to listen. There was a rushing sound beyond the room, far down the hall, on the stairs. Cesare felt the paralysis in his limbs relax and a weakness come upon them. The mage stood listening, one hand upraised as if in warning to be still. The sound was like a great wind, like a gale in the corridor.

Then the door burst open and, in a cloud of mephitic odour, Lesandro's familiar appeared, hesitating on the threshold. But only for a second did it falter; then it launched forward, terribly, and descended like a fog before Cesare's eyes, surrounding the mage, its master.

Cesare felt his limbs abruptly free. He had supposed that the familiar was returning to slay him as well, but this apparently was not so. Strange, gasping sounds emerged from the fog beyond the table, quick, urgent noises as of violent struggle—a clang and rattle as the brazier on the table tipped and rolled to the floor—a shattering sound as the hour-glass broke.

Then, as suddenly as it had come, the cloud and the familiar were gone. Beyond the table lay the body of Messer Lesandro, brutally twisted and broken, on his face horror the like of which the Prince Borgia had not looked upon before.

'Take off your habit, and step upon the balcony, Your Highness. By showing yourself to the populace from Lesandro's room, the gates will easily be opened to our troops.'

Cesare whirled.

It was Vincelli who stood upon the threshold.

'Blood of the saints! I thought you dead!'

'I do not die easily,' said Vincelli.

'But you, a student, to confound a master of the black art!' And Cesare paused, his eyes demanding explanation.

'My grandfather was the great mage Orvolo Vincellente. He had two students, myself and Lesandro, who fled him, taking my grandfather's familiar with him. There was no greater mage than Orvolo Vincellente. He taught Lesandro almost all he knew; he taught me *all* he knew. Thus I was able to send Lesandro's familiar back upon him and to destroy him.' He paused, smiling faintly, and added, 'Will Your Highness step upon the balcony?'

OLIVER CROMWELL—SATANIST

'It is not at all to be wondered at that during the rebellion and under the Commonwealth the evil weed of witchcraft spread so rapidly throughout England and that sorcerers fouled the whole land, since, as is now proved beyond any shadow of doubt, Oliver Cromwell was a Satanist, intimately leagued with the powers of darkness to whom he had sold his soul for temporal success. After 1642, indeed, as the historian Eachard has well remarked: "Blasphemies, Heresies, Enthusiasms, and Witchcrafts were in a full tide." In my Geography of Witchcraft I drew attention to the pact which Cromwell had made with the devil, and related his interview with the fiend before the battle of Worcester. The infernal pact was for thirty-nine years. And when Cromwell died at three of the clock on the 3rd September, 1658, there had raged for many hours a fearful storm round Whitehall; the Devil had come for his own, folk said. The admirers of Cromwell have been absolutely unable to answer these charges. At best they have been forced to content themselves with sharp but not very relevant reflections upon scholars who "burrow among the lampoons of the Restoration." I think I may venture to claim some acquaintance with Restoration literature and I can safely assert that the occult practices of Cromwell are not a theme with Restoration satirists, high or low. His witchcrafts are proved not by the censure and detraction of any opponent, but by historical documents whose genuineness cannot be called in doubt.'

MONTAGUE SUMMERS,
A Popular History of Witchcraft

The Liers in Wait

MANLY WADE WELLMAN

Here lies our Sovereign Lord the King,
Whose word no man relies on,
Who never said a foolish thing,
Nor ever did a wise one.

—*Proffered Epitaph on Charles II*
John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester
(1647-1680)

Yes, Jack Wilmot wrote so concerning me, and rallied me, saying these lines he would cut upon my monument ; and now he is dead at thirty-three, while I live at fifty, none so merry a monarch as folks deem me. Jack's verse makes me out a coxcomb, but he knew me not in my youth. He was but four, and sucking sugar-plums, when his father and I were fugitives after Worcester. Judge from this story, if he rhymes the truth of me.

I think it was then, with the rain soaking my wretched borrowed clothes and the heavy tight plough-shoes rubbing my feet all to blisters, that I first knew consciously how misery may come to kings as to vagabonds. E'gad, I was turned the second before I had well been the first. Trying to think of other things than my present sorry state among the dripping trees of Spring Coppice, I could but remember sorrier things still. Chiefly came to mind the Worcester fight, that had been rather a cutting down of my poor men like barley, and Cromwell's Ironside troopers the reapers. How could so much ill luck befall—Lauderdale's bold folly, that wasted our best men in a charge? The mazed silence of Leslie's Scots horse, the first of their blood I ever heard of before or since who refused battle? I remembered too, as a sick dream, how I charged with a few faithful at a troop of Parliamentary horse said to be Cromwell's own guard; I had cut down a mailed rider with a pale face like the winter moon, and rode back dragging one of my own, wounded sore, across my saddle bow. He

had died there, crying to me: 'God save your most sacred Majesty!' And now I had need of God to save me.

'More things than Cromwell's wit and might went into this disaster,' I told myself in the rain, nor knew how true I spoke.

After the battle, the retreat. Had it been only last night? Leslie's horsemen, who had refused to follow me toward Cromwell, had dogged me so close in fleeing him I was at pains to scatter and so avoid them. Late we had paused, my gentlemen and I, at a manor of White-Ladies. There we agreed to divide and flee in disguise. With the help of two faithful yokels named Penderel I cut my long curls with a knife and crammed my big body into coarse garments—grey cloth breeches, a leathern doublet, a green jump-coat—while that my friends smeared my face and hands with chimney-soot. Then farewells, and I gave each gentleman a keepsake—a ribbon, a buckle, a watch, and so forward. I remembered, too, my image in a mirror, and it was most unkingly—a towering, swarthy young man, ill-clad, ill-faced. One of the staunch Penderels bade me name myself, and I chose to be called Will Jones, a wandering woodcutter.

Will Jones! 'Twas an easy name and comfortable. For the nonce I was happier with it than with Charles Stuart, England's king and son of that other Charles who had died by Cromwell's axe. I was heir to bitter sorrow and trouble and mystery, in my youth lost and hunted and friendless as any strong thief.

The rain was steady and weary. I tried to ask myself what I did here in Spring Coppice. It had been necessary to hide the day out, and travel by night; but whose thought was it to choose this dim, sorrowful wood? Richard Penderel had said that no rain fell elsewhere. Perhaps that was well, since Ironsides might forbear to seek me in such sorry bogs; but meanwhile I shivered and sighed, and wished myself a newt. The trees, what I could see, were broad oaks with some fir and larch, and the ground grew high with bracken reddened by September's first chill.

Musing thus, I heard a right ill sound—horses' hoofs. I threw myself half-downways among some larch scrub, peering out through the clumpy leaves. My right hand clutched the axe I carried as part of my masquerade. Beyond was a lane, and along it, one by one, rode enemy—a troop of Cromwell's horse, hard fellows and ready-seeming, with breasts and caps of iron. They stared right and left searchingly. The bright, bitter eyes of their officer seemed to strike though my hiding like a pike-point. I clutched my axe the tighter, and swore on my soul that, if found, I would die fighting—a better death, after all, than my poor father's.

But they rode past, and out of sight. I sat up, and wiped muck from my long nose. 'I am free yet,' I told myself. 'One day, please our Lord, I shall sit on the throne that is mine. Then I shall seek out these Ironsides and feed fat the gallows at Tyburn, the block at the Tower.'

For I was young and cruel then, as now I am old and mellow. Religion perplexed and irked me. I could not understand nor like Cromwell's Praise-God men of war, whose faces were as sharp and merciless as, alas, their swords. 'I'll give them texts to quote,' I vowed. 'I have heard their canting war-cries. "Smite and spare not!" They shall learn how it is to be smitten and spared not.'

For the moment I felt as if vengeance were already mine, my house restored to power, my adversaries chained and delivered into my hand. Then I turned to cooler thoughts, and chiefly that I had best seek a hiding less handy to that trail through the trees.

The thought was like sudden memory, as if indeed I knew the Coppice and where best to go.

For I mind me how I rose from among the larches, turned on the heel of one pinching shoe, and struck through a belt of young spruce as though I were indeed a woodcutter seeking by familiar ways the door of mine own hut. So confidently did I stride that I blundered—or did I?—into a thorny vine that hung down from a long oak limb. It fastened upon my sleeve like urging fingers. 'Nay, friend,' I said to it, trying to be gay, 'hold me not here in the wet,' and I twitched away. That was one more matter about Spring Coppice that seemed strange and not over canny—as also the rain, the gloom, my sudden desire to travel toward its heart. Yet, as you shall see here, these things were strange only in their basic cause. But I forego the tale.

'So cometh Will Jones to his proper home,' quoth I, axe on shoulder. Speaking thus merrily, I came upon another lane, but narrower than that on which the horseman had ridden. This ran ankle-deep in mire, and I remember how the damp, soaking into my shoes, soothed those plaguey blisters. I followed the way for some score of paces, and me seemed that the rain was heaviest here, like a curtain before some hidden thing. Then I came into a cleared space, with no trees nor bush, nor even grass upon the bald earth. In its centre, wreathed with rainy mists, a house.

I paused, just within shelter of the leaves. 'What,' I wondered, 'has my new magic of being a woodcutter conjured up a wood cutter's shelter?'

But this house was no honest workman's place, that much I saw with but half an eye. Conjured up it might well have been, and most foully. I gazed at it without savour, and saw that it

was not large, but lean and high-looking by reason of the steep pitch of its roof. That roof's thatch was so wet and foul that it seemed all of one drooping substance, like the cap of a dark toadstool. The walls, too, were damp, being of clay daub spread upon a framework of wattles. It had one door, and that a mighty thick heavy one, of a single dark plank that hung upon heavy rusty hinges. One window it had, too, through which gleamed some sort of light; but instead of glass the window was filled with something like thin-scraped rawhide, so that light could come through, but not the shape of things within. And so I knew not what was in that house, nor at the time had I any conscious lust to find out.

I say, no conscious lust. For it was unconsciously that I drifted idly forth from the screen of wet leaves, gained and moved along a little hard-packed path between bracken-clumps. That path led to the door, and I found myself standing before it; while through the skinned-over window, inches away, I heard noises.

Noises! I call them, for at first I could not think they were voices. Several soft hummings or purrings came to my ears, from what source I knew not. Finally, though, actual words, high and raspy:

'We who keep the commandment love the law! Moloch, Lucifer, Bal-Tigh-Mor, Anector, Somiator, sleep ye not! Compel ye that the man approach!'

It had the sound of a prayer, and yet I recognized but one of the names called—Lucifer. Tutors, parsons, my late unhappy allies the Scots Covenantors, had used the name oft and fearfully. Prayer within that ugly lean house went up—or down, belike—to the fallen Son of the Morning. I stood against the door, pondering. My grandsire, King James, had believed and feared such folks' pretence. My father, who was King Charles before me, was pleased to doubt and be merciful, pardoning many accused witches and sorcerers. As for me, my short life had held scant leisure to decide such a matter. While I waited in the fine misty rain on the threshold, the high voice spoke again:

'Drive him to us! Drive him to us! Drive him to us!'

Silence within, and you may be sure silence without. A new voice, younger and thinner, made itself heard: 'Naught comes to us.'

'Respect the promises of our masters,' replied the first. 'What says the book?'

And yet a new voice, this time soft and a woman's: 'Let the door be opened and the wayfarer be plucked in.'

I swear that I had not the least impulse to retreat, even to step

aside. 'Twas as if all my life depended on knowing more. As I stood, ears aprick like any cat's, the door creaked inward by three inches. An arm in a dark sleeve shot out, and fingers as lean and clutching as thorn-twigs fastened on the front of my jump-coat.

'I have him safe!' rasped the high voice that had prayed. A moment later I was drawn inside, before I could ask the reason.

There was one room to the house, and it stank of burning weeds. There were no chairs or other furniture, and no fireplace; but in the centre of the tamped-clay floor burned an open fire, whose rank smoke climbed to a hole at the roof's peak. Around this fire was drawn a circle in white chalk, and around the circle a star in red. Close outside the star were the three whose voices I had heard.

Mine eyes lighted first on she who held the book—young she was and dainty. She sat on the floor, her feet drawn under her full skirt of black stuff. Above a white collar of Dutch style, her face was round and at the same time fine and fair, with a short red mouth and blue eyes like the clean sea.

Her hair, under a white cap, was as yellow as corn. She held in her slim white hands a thick book, whose cover looked to be grown over with dark hair, like the hide of a Galloway bull.

Her eyes held mine for two trices, then I looked beyond her to another seated person. He was small enough to be a child, but the narrow bright eyes in his thin face were older than the oldest I had seen, and the hands clasped around his bony knees were rough and sinewy, with large sore-seeming joints. His hair was scanty, and eke his eyebrows. His neck showed swollen painfully.

It is odd that my last look was for him who had drawn me in. He was tall, almost as myself, and grizzled hair fell on the shoulders of his velvet doublet. One claw still clapped hold of me and his face, a foot from mine, was as dark and bloodless as earth. Its lips were loose, its quivering nose broken. The eyes, cold and wide as a frog's, were as steady as gun-muzzles.

He kicked the door shut, and let me go. 'Name yourself,' he rasped at me. 'If you be not he whom we seek—'

'I am Will Jones, a poor woodcutter,' I told him.

'Mmmm,' murmured the wench with the book. 'Belike the youngest of seven sons—sent forth by a cruel step-dame to seek fortune in the world. So runs the fairy tale, and we want none such. Your true name, sirrah.'

I told her roundly that she was insolent, but she only smiled. And I never saw a fairer than she, not in all the courts of Europe—not even sweet Nell Gwyn. After many years I can see

her eyes, a little slanting and a little hungry. Even when I was so young, women feared me, but this one did not.

'His word shall not need,' spoke the thin young-old fellow by the fire. 'Am I not here to make him prove himself?' He lifted his face so that the fire brightened it, and I saw hot red blotches thereon.

'True,' agreed the grizzled man. 'Sirrah, whether you be Will Jones the woodman or Charles Stuart the king, have you no mercy on poor Diccon yonder? If 'twould ease his ail, would you not touch him?'

That was a sneer, but I looked closer at the thin fellow called Diccon, and made sure that he was indeed sick-and sorry. His face grew full of hope, and turning up to me. I stepped close to him.

'Why, with all my heart, if 'twill serve,' I replied.

'Ware the star and circle, step not within the star and circle,' cautioned the wench, but I came not near those marks. Standing beside and above Diccon I felt his brow, and felt that it was fevered. 'A hot humour is in your blood, friend,' I said to him, and touched the swelling on his neck.

But had there been a swelling there? I touched it, but 'twas suddenly gone, like a furtive mouse under my finger. Diccon's necked looked lean and healthy. His face smiled, and from it had fled the red blotches. He gave a cry and sprang to his feet.

'Tis past, 'tis past!' he howled. 'I am whole again!'

But the eyes of his comrades were for me.

'Only a king could have done so,' quoth the older man. 'Young sir, I do take you truly for Charles Stuart. At your touch Diccon was healed of the king's evil.'

I folded my arms, as if I must keep my hands from doing more strangeness. I had heard, too, of that old legend of the Stuarts, without deeming myself concerned. Yet, here it had befallen. Diccon had suffered from the king's evil, which learned doctors call scrofula. My touch had driven it from his thin body. He danced and quivered with the joy of health. But his fellows looked at me as though I had betrayed myself by sin.

'It is indeed the king,' said the girl, also rising to her feet.

'No,' I made shift to say. 'I am but poor Will Jones,' and I wondered where I had let fall my axe. 'Will Jones, a woodcutter.'

'Yours to command, Will Jones,' mocked the grizzled man. 'My name is Valois Pemburu, erst a schoolmaster. My daughter Regan,' and he flourished one of his talons at the wench. 'Diccon, our kinsman and servitor, you know already, well enough to heal him. For our profession, we are—are—'

He seemed to have said too much, and his daughter came to his rescue. 'We are liars in wait,' she said.

'True, liars in wait,' repeated Pemburu, glad of the words. 'Quiet we bide our time, against what good things come our way. As yourself, Will Jones. Would you sit in sooth upon the throne of England? For that question we brought you hither.'

I did not like his lofty air, like a man cozening puppies. 'I came myself, of mine own good will,' I told him. 'It rains outside.'

'True,' muttered Diccon, his eyes on me. 'All over Spring Coppice falls the rain, and not elsewhere. Not one, but eight charms in yonder book can bring rain—'twas to drive your honour to us, that you might heal—'

'Silence,' barked Valois Pemburu at him. And to me: 'Young sir, we read and prayed and burnt,' and he glanced at the dark-orange flames of the fire. 'In that way we guided your footsteps to the Coppice, and the rain then made you see this shelter. 'Twas all planned, even before Noll Cromwell scotched you at Worcester—'

'Worcester!' I roared at him so loudly that he stepped back. 'What know you of Worcester fight?'

He recovered, and said in his erst lofty fashion: 'Worcester was our doing, too. We gave the victory to Noll Cromwell. At a price—from the book.'

He pointed to the hairy tome in the hands of Regan, his daughter. 'The flames showed us your pictured hosts and his, and what befell. You might have stood against him, even prevailed, but for the horsemen who would not fight.'

I remembered that bitter amazement over how Leslie's Scots had bode like statues. 'You dare say you wrought that?'

Pemburu nodded at Mistress Regan, who turned pages. 'I will read it without the words of power,' quoth she. 'Thus: "In meekness I begin my work. Stop rider! Stop footman! Three black flowers bloom, and under them ye must stand still as long as I will, not through me but through the name of—"

She broke off, staring at me with her slant blue eyes. I remembered all the tales of my grandfather James, who had fought and written against witchcraft. 'Well, then, you have given the victory to Cromwell. You will give me to him also?'

Two of the three laughed—Diccon was still too mazed with his new health—and Pemburu shook his grizzled head. 'Not so, woodcutter. Cromwell asked not the favour from us—'twas one of his men, who paid well. We swore that old Noll should prevail from the moment of battle. But,' and his eyes were like gimlets in mine, 'we swore by the oaths set us—the names Crom-

well's men worship, not the names we worship. We will keep the promise as long as we will, and no longer.'

'When it pleases us we make,' contributed Regan. 'When it pleases us we break.'

Now 'tis true that Cromwell perished on third September, 1658, seven year to the day from Worcester fight. But I half-believed Pembro even as he spoke, and so would you have done. He seemed to be what he called himself—a liar in wait, a bider for prey, myself or others. The rank smoke of the fire made my head throb, and I was weary of being played with. 'Let be,' I said. 'I am no mouse to be played with, you gibbed cats. What is your will?'

'Ah,' sighed Pembro silkily, as though he had waited for me to ask, 'what but that our sovereign should find his fortune again, scatter the Ironsides of the Parliament in another battle and come to his throne at Whitehall?'

'It can be done,' Regan assured me. 'Shall I find the words in the book, that when spoken will gather and make resolute your scattered, running friends?'

I put up a hand. 'Read nothing. Tell me rather what you would gain thereby, since you seem to be governed by gains alone.'

'Charles Second shall reign,' breathed Pembro. 'Wisely and well, with thoughtful distinction. He will thank his good councillor the Earl—no, the Duke—of Pembro. He will be served well by Sir Diccon, his squire of the body.'

'Served well, I swear,' promised Diccon, with no mockery to his words.

'And,' cooed Regan, 'are there not ladies of the court? Will it not be said that Lady Regan Pembro is fairest and—most pleasing to the king's grace?'

Then they were all silent, waiting for me to speak. God pardon me my many sins! But among them has not been silence when words are needed. I laughed fiercely.

'You are three saucy lackeys, ripe to be flogged at the cart's tail,' I told them. 'By tricks you learned of my ill fortune, and seek to fatten thereon.' I turned toward the door. 'I sicken in your company, and I leave. Let him hinder me who dare.'

'Diccon!' called Pembro, and moved as if to cross my path. Diccon obediently ranged alongside. I stepped up to them.

'If you dread me not as your ruler, dread me as a big man and a strong,' I said. 'Step from my way, or I will smash your shallow skulls together.'

Then it was Regan, standing across the door.

'Would the king strike a woman?' she challenged. 'Wait for two words to be spoken. Suppose we have the powers we claim?'

'Your talk is empty, without proof,' I replied. 'No, mistress, bar me not. I am going.'

'Proof you shall have,' she assured me hastily. 'Diccon, stir the fire.'

He did so. Watching, I saw that in sooth he was but a lad—his disease, now banished by my touch, had put a false seeming of age upon him. Flames leaped up, and upon them Pembru cast a handful of herbs whose sort I did not know. The colour of the fire changed as I gazed, white, then rosy red, then blue, then again white. The wench Regan was babbling words from the hair-bound book; but, though I had learned most tongues in my youth, I could not guess what language she read.

'Ah, now,' said Pembru. 'Look, your gracious majesty. Have you wondered of your beaten followers?'

In the deep of the fire, like a picture that forebore burning and moved with life, I saw tiny figures—horsemen in a huddled knot riding in dejected wise. Though it was as if they rode at a distance, I fancied that I recognized young Straike—a cornet of Leslie's. I scowled, and the vision vanished.

'You have prepared puppets, or a shadow-show,' I accused. 'I am no country hodge to be tricked thus.'

'Ask of the fire what it will mirror to you,' bade Pembru, and I looked on him with disdain.

'What of Noll Cromwell?' I demanded, and on the trice he was there. I had seen the fellow once, years ago. He looked more grey and bloated and fierce now, but it was he—Cromwell, the king rebel, in back and breast of steel with buff sleeves. He stood with wide-planted feet and a hand on his sword. I took it that he was on a porch or platform, about to speak to a throng dimly seen.

'You knew that I would call for Cromwell,' I charged Pembru, and the second image, too, winked out.

He smiled, as if my stubbornness was what he loved best on earth. 'Who else, then? Name one I cannot have prepared for.'

'Wilmot,' I said, and quick anon I saw him. Poor nobleman! He was not young enough to tramp the byways in masquerade, like me. He rode a horse, and that a sorry one, with his pale face cast down. He mourned, perhaps for me. I felt like smiling at this image of my friend, and like weeping, too.

'Others? Your gentlemen?' suggested Pembru, and without my naming they sprang into view one after another, each in a breath's space. Their faces flashed among the shreds of

flame—Buckingham, elegant and furtive; Lauderdale, drinking from a leather cup; Colonel Carlis, whom we called 'Careless,' though he was never that; the brothers Penderel, by a fireside with an old dame who may have been their mother; suddenly, as a finish to the show, Cromwell again, seen near with a bible in his hand.

The fire died, like a blown candle. The room was dim and grey, with a wisp of smoke across the hide-spread window.

'Well, sire? You believe?' said Pembru. He smiled now, and I saw teeth as lean and white as a hunting dog's.

'Faith, only a fool would refuse to believe,' I said in all honesty.

He stepped near. 'Then you accept us?' he questioned hoarsely. On my other hand tiptoed the fair lass Regan.

'Charles!' she whispered. 'Charles, my comely king!' and pushed herself close against me, like a cat seeking caresses.

'Your choice is wise,' Pembroke said on. 'Spells bemused and scattered your army—spells will bring it back afresh. You shall triumph, and salt England with the bones of the rebels. Noll Cromwell shall swing from a gallows, that all like rogues may take warning. And you, brought by our powers to your proper throne—'

'Hold,' I said, and they looked upon me silently.

'I said only that I believe in your sorcery,' I told them, 'but I will have none of it.'

You would have thought those words plain and round enough. But my three neighbours in that ill house stared mutely, as if I spoke strangely and foolishly. Finally: 'Oh, brave and gay! Let me perish else!' quoth Pembru, and laughed.

My temper went, and with it my bemusement. 'Perish you shall, dog, for your saucy ways,' I promised. 'What, you stare and grin? Am I your sovereign lord, or am I a penny show? I have humoured you too long. Goodbye.'

I made a step to leave, and Pembru slid across my path. His daughter Regan was opening the book and reciting hurriedly, but I minded her not a penny. Instead, I smote Pembru with my fist, hard and fair in the middle of his mocking face. And down he went, full-sprawl, rosy blood fountaining over mouth and chin.

'Cross me again,' quoth I, 'and I'll drive you into your native dirt like a tether-peg.' With that, I stepped across his body where it quivered like a wounded snake, and put forth my hand to open the door.

There was no door. Not anywhere in the room.

I turned back, the while Regan finished reading and closed the book upon her slim finger.

'You see, Charles Stuart,' she smiled, 'you must bide here in despite of yourself.'

'Sir, sir,' pleaded Diccon, half-crouching like a cricket, 'will you not mend your opinion of us?'

'I will mend naught,' I said, 'save the lack of a door.' And I gave the wall a kick that shook the stout wattlings and brought down flakes of clay. My blistered foot quivered with pain, but another kick made some of the poles spring from their fastenings. In a moment I would open a way outward, would go forth.

Regan shouted new words from the book. I remember a few, like uncouth names—Sator, Arepos, Janna. I have heard since that these are powerful matters with the Gnostics. In the midst of her outcry, I thought smoke drifted before me—smoke that stank like dead flesh, and thickened into globes and curves, as if it would make a form. Two long streamers of it drifted out like snakes, to touch or seize me. I gave back, and Regan stood at my side.

'Would you choose those arms,' asked she, 'and not these?' She held out her own, fair and round and white. 'Charles, I charmed away the door. I charmed that spirit to hold you. I will still do you good in despite of your will—you shall reign in England, and I—and I—'

Weariness was drowning me. I felt like a child, drowsy and drooping. 'And you?' I said.

'You shall tell me,' she whispered. 'Charles.'

She shimmered in my sight, and bells sang as if to signal her victory. I swear it was not I who spoke then stupidly—consult Jack Wilmot's doggerel to see if I am wont to be stupid. But the voice came from my mouth: 'I shall be king in Whitehall.'

She prompted me softly 'I shall be duchess, and next friend—'

'Duchess and next friend,' I repeated.

'Of the king's self!' she finished, and I opened my mouth to say that, too. Valois Pemburu, recovering from my buffet, sat up and listened.

But—

'Stop!' roared Diccon.

We looked—Regan and I and Valois Pemburu. Diccon rose from where he crouched. In his slim, strong hands was the foul hairy book that Regan had laid aside. His finger marked a place on the open page.

'The spells are mine, and I undo what they have wrought!' he thundered in his great new voice. 'Stop and silence! Look upon me, ye sorcerers and arch-sorcerers! You who attack Charles Stuart, let that witchcraft recede from him into your marrow and bone, in this instant and hour—'

He read more, but I could not hear for the horrid cries of Pembru and his daughter.

The rawhide at the window split, like a drum-head made too hot. And cold air rushed in. The fire that had vanished leaped up, its flames bright red and natural now. Its flames scaled the roof-peak, caught there. Smoke, rank and foul, crammed the place. Through it rang more screams, and I heard Regan, pantingly:

'Hands—from—my—throat—!'

Whatever had seized her, it was not Diccon, for he was at my side, hand on my sleeve.

'Come, sire! This way!'

Whither the door had gone, thither it now came back. We found it open before us, scrambled through and into the open. The hut burnt behind us like a hayrick, and I heard no more cries therefrom. 'Pembru!' I cried. 'Regan! Are they slain?'

'Slain or no, it does not signify,' replied Diccon. 'Their ill magic retorted upon them. They are gone with it from earth—forever.' He hurled the hairy book into the midst of the flame. 'Now, away.'

We left the clearing, and walked the lane. There was no more rainfall, no more mist. Warm light came through the leaves as through clear green water.

'Sir,' said Diccon, 'I part from you. God bless your kind and gracious majesty! Bring you safe to your own place, and your people to their proper senses.'

He caught my hand and kissed it, and would have knelt. But I held him on his feet.

'Diccon,' I said, 'I took you for one of those liers in wait. But you have been my friend this day, and I stand in your debt as long as I live.'

'No, sire, no. Your touch drove from me the pain of the king's evil, which had smitten me since childhood, and which those God-forgotten could not heal with all their charms. And, too, you refused witch-help against Cromwell.'

I met his round, true eye. 'Sooth to say, Cromwell and I make war on each other,' I replied, 'but—'

'But 'tis human war,' he said to me. 'Each in his way hates hell. 'Twas bravely done, sire. Remember that Cromwell's course is run in seven years. Be content until then. Now—God speed!'

He turned suddenly and made off amid the leafage. I walked on alone, toward where the brothers Penderel would rejoin me with news of where next we would seek safety. Many things churned in my silly head, things that have not sorted themselves in all the years since; but this came to the top of the churn like fair butter.

The war in England was sad and sorry and bloody, as all wars. Each party called the other God-forsaken, devilish. Each was wrong. We were but human folk, doing what we thought well, and doing it ill. Worse than any human foe was sorcery and appeal to the Devil's host.

I promised myself then, and have not since departed from it, that when I ruled, no honest religion would be driven out. All and any such, I said in my heart, was so good that it bettered the worship of evil. Beyond that, I wished only for peace and security, and the chance to take off my blistering shoes.

'Lord,' I prayed, 'if thou art pleased to restore me to the throne of my ancestors, grant me a heart constant in the exercise and protection of true worship. Never may I seek the oppression of those who, out of tenderness of their consciences, are not free to conform to outward and indifferent ceremonies.'

And now judge between me and Jack Wilmot, Earl of Rochester. There is at least one promise I have kept, and at least one wise deed I have done. Put that on my grave.

THERE WAS WITCHCRAFT AT SALEM

'A few persons have recognized that magic and dealing with the devil was actually employed in Massachusetts, and at least two have wondered whether there might not have been something behind the charges of witchcraft after all. Historian W. F. Poole tells us that Longfellow examined some of the seventeenth-century narratives before composing his play on the Salem trials, Giles Corey of the Salem Farms. Longfellow was learned enough to recognize that Cotton Mather's suspicions had been aroused by concrete evidence of magic. David R. Proper, formerly librarian of Essex Institute in Salem, tells me that G. L. Kittredge suspected there might have been witchcraft practised at Salem. However, he did not pursue his suspicions; at least I have not been able to discover any further evidence that would lead me to believe otherwise. Finally, the late dean of Twentieth-Century New England studies, Perry Miller, knew there had been magic in the Glover case of 1688 at Boston, yet he was unable to take seriously a practice he found contemptible. But it has to be taken seriously. One cannot fully understand any aspects of events at Salem without a recognition of the genuine power of witchcraft in a society that believes in it. The failure to appreciate this fact has vitiated all previous accounts of witchcraft at Salem.'

CHADWICK HANSEN,
Witchcraft at Salem

Is the Devil a Gentleman?

SEABURY QUINN

It had been a day of strange weather, a day the calendar declared to be late April and the thermometer proclaimed to be March or November. From dawn till early dark the rain had spattered down, chill, persistent, deceptive, making it feel many degrees colder than it really was, but just at sunset it had cleared and a sort of angry yellow half-light had spilled from a sky of streaky black against a bank of blood-red clouds. Now, while the dying wind was groping with chill-stiffened fingers at the window-casings, a fire blazed on the study hearth, its comforting rose glow a gleaming island in the gathering shadows, its reflection daubing ever-changing pattern on the walls and tightly-drawn curtains.

'On such a night,' the Bishop quoted inexactly as he helped himself to brandy, 'mine enemy's dog, though he had bit me, I would not turn away from my door.'

Dr. Bentley, rector of St. Chrysostom's, dropped a second lump of sugar in his coffee and said nothing. He knew the Bishop, and had known him since their student days. When he quoted Shakespeare he was really searching through the lumber rooms of memory for a story, and there were few who had a better store of anecdotes than the Right Reverend Richard Chauncey, missionary, soldier, preacher and ecclesiastical executive, worldly man of God and godly man of the world. He'd looked forward to Dick's coming down for confirmation, and had made a point of asking Kitteringson in to dinner. Kitteringson was all right, of course; good, earnest worker, a good preacher and a good churchman, but a trifle too—how should he put it?—too dogmatic. If you couldn't find it in the writings of the Fathers of the Church or the Thirty-nine Articles he was against a proposition, whatever it might be. A session with the Bishop would be good for him.

'Good stuff in the lad,' thought Dr. Bentley as he studied his

junior covetly. A rather strong, intelligent face he had, but marked by asceticism, the face of one who might be either an unyielding martyr or a merciless inquisitor. Now he was leaning forward almost eagerly, and the firelight did things to his earnest face—made it look like one of those old medieval monks in the old masters' paintings.

'I've been wondering all day, sir,' he told Bishop Chauncey, 'what you meant when you told the confirmation class they should use common sense about religious prejudices. Surely, there may be no compromise with evil—'

'I shouldn't care to lay that down as a precept,' the Bishop answered with a low chuckle. 'We're told the Devil can quote Scripture for his purposes; why shouldn't Christians make use of the powers of darkness in a proper case?'

Young Dr. Kitteringson was aghast. 'Make use of Satan?' he faltered. 'Have dealings with the arch-fiend—'

'Precisely, son. Shakespeare might have been more truthful than poetical when he declared the Prince of Darkness is a gentleman.'

'I can't conceive of such a thing!' the younger man retorted. 'All our experiences tell us—'

'All?' cut in Bishop Chauncey softly, and the young rector fell hesitant before the level irony of his gaze. 'How old are you, son?'

'Thirty-two, sir, but I've read the writings of the Fathers of the Early Church, and one and all they tell us that to compromise with evil is a sin against—' He stopped, a little abashed at the look of tolerant amusement on his senior's face, then: 'Can you name even one case when compromise with evil didn't end disastrously for all concerned, sir?' he challenged.

'Yes, I think I can,' the Bishop passed the brandy sniffer back and forth beneath his nostrils, inhaled the bouquet of the old cognac appreciatively, then took a delicate, approving sip. 'I think I can, son. Like you, I have to call upon my reading to sustain me, but unlike you I can't claim ecclesiastical authority for my writers. One of them, indeed, was an ancestor of mine, a great-grandfather several times removed.'

The gloom that waited just beyond the moving edge of firelight seemed flowing forward, like a slowly rising, stagnant tide, and a blazing ember falling to the layer of sand beneath the burning logs sent a sudden shaft of light across the intervening shade, casting a quick shadow of the Bishop on the farther wall. An odd shadow it was, not like the rubicund, grey-haired churchman, but queerly elongated and distorted, so that it appeared to be the shade of a lean man with gaunt and predatory features, muffled in a cloak

and leaning forward at the shoulders, like one intent—almost in the act of pouncing.

Kundre Maltby (said the Bishop, drawing thoughtfully at his cigar so its recurrent glow etched his face in alternate red highlight and black shadow) was a confessed witch, and witches, as you know, are those who have made solemn compact with the Evil One.

She was a Swedish girl—at least she claimed that she was Swedish—whom Captain Pelatiah Maltby had found somewhere in his travels, married, and brought back to Danby by Salem. Who she really was nobody knew.

Captain Maltby's ship, the *Bountiful Adventure*, came on her Easter Monday morning, clinging to a hatch-grating some twenty miles or so off the Madeira coast. He'd cleared from Funchal the night before, swearing that he'd never make the port again, for the Portuguese had celebrated Easter with an *auto da fé* at which a hundred condemned witches had been burned, and the sight of the poor wretches' sufferings sickened him. When he asked the castaway her name she told him it was Kundre, and said her ship had been the *Blenkinge* of Stockholm, wrecked three days before.

Maltby marvelled at this information, for he had been in the Madeiras for a whole week, and there had been no storm; not even a light squall. But there the girl was, lashed to the floating hatch-top, virtually nude and all but dead with thirst and starvation. Moreover, she had very winning ways and more than a fair share of beauty, so Captain Maltby asked no further questions, but put in at New York and married her before he brought the *Bountiful Adventure* up the coast to Danby.

Their life together seems to have been ideal, possibly idyllic. He was a raw-boned, tough-thewed son of New England, hard as flint outside and practical as the multiplication tables within. But it was from such ancestry that Whittier and Holmes and Bryant and Longfellow sprang, and probably beneath his workaday exterior Pelatiah Maltby had a poet's soul. They had twin children, a boy and a girl. At Pelatiah's insistence the girl was named for her mother, but Kundre chose the name of Micah for the boy, for in the whole Scripture she liked best that Prophet's question, 'What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?'

She took to transplantation like a hardy flower, and grew and flourished on New England soil. From all accounts she must have been a beauty in a heavy Nordic way, a true woman of the sea. Full six feet tall she was, and strong as any man, yet with all the gracious curves of womanhood. Her hair, they say, was golden. Not merely yellow, but that metallic shade of gold which, catching

glints of outside light, seems to hold a light of its own. And her skin was white as sea-foam, and her eyes the bright blue-green of the ice of the fjords, and her lips were red as sunset on the ocean when a storm has blown itself away.

Prosperity came with her, too. The winds were always favourable to Captain Maltby's ship. He made the longest voyages in the shortest time. When other ships were set upon by tempests and battered till they were mere hulks he came safely through the raving storms or missed them altogether, and his enterprises always prospered. Foreign traders sold him goods at laughably low prices, or bought the cargoes that he brought at prices that astonished him.

He brought back treasures from the far corners of the earth, silks from Cathay and Nippon, carved coral from the South Sea Isles, pearls from Java, diamonds from Africa, a comb of solid beaten gold from India—and the golden comb seemed pallid when she drew it through the golden spate of her loosed golden hair.

The neighbours were first amazed, then wondering, finally suspicious. Experience had taught them Providence dealt even-handedly with men and balanced its smiles with its frowns. Yet Pelatiah Maltby always won. He never had to drain a cup of vinegar to compensate him for the many heady cups of the wine of success he quaffed.

It was Captain Joel Newton who brought matters to a head. He and Captain Maltby had been rivals many years. His pew was just across the aisle from Maltby's in the meeting house, his wife sat where she could not help but see the worldly gewgaws Maltby lavished on Kundre, and Abigail Newton's tongue had an edge like that of a new-filed adze, and her jealousy the bitter bite of acid. Joel Newton heard himself compared to Pelatiah Maltby, with small advantage, every Lord's Day after service, and, driven by the lash of a shrew's tongue, he determined to find the key to Maltby's constant success, and set himself deliberately to trail the *Bountiful Adventure* from one port to another.

Not that it helped him. The *Bountiful Adventure* outsailed him every trip, and when he came into a foreign berth he found that Maltby had been there before him, secured what trade there was, and sailed away.

They came face to face at last at Tamatave in Madagascar. Maltby had traded rum and salted fish and tobacco for a holdful of rich native silver, and the local traders had no thought of laying in new stocks for months. Newton's ship was loaded to capacity with just the wares that Maltby had disposed of so profitably, there was no market for his cargo, his food was running low, and ruin stared him in the face.

Both had taken more of the French wines the inn purveyed than was their custom. Maltby was flushed with success, Newton bitter with the mordancy of disappointment. 'Had I a witch-woman for wife I'd always fare well, too,' he told his rival.

'How quotha?' Maltby asked. 'What meanest, knave? My Kundre is the fairest, sweetest bloom—'

'As ever sank its taproots deep in hell,' his rival finished for him, 'Oh, don't 'ee think to fool us, Neighbour Maltby! We know what 'tis that always sends the fair winds at thy tail when others lie becalmed. We know what 'tis that makes the heathen take thy wares at such great prices, and pay thee ten times what thou'd hoped to get. Aye, and we know whence comes thy witch-mate, too—how the Papishers had burned a drove of warlocks in the Madeiras the day before ye found her floating in the ocean. She said her vessel had been wrecked three days before, but had there been a storm? Thou knowest well there had not. Did'st offer her free passage back to the island, and did she take thy offer kindly?'

Now this was a poser, for Pelatiah had offered to set Kundre on shore at Funchal when he rescued her, and she had refused tearfully, and begged him to hold to his course.

'And why?' asked Captain Newton as he warmed to his task of denunciation. 'I'll tell 'ee why, my fine bucko—because she was a cursed witch who'd slipped between the Papists' fingers and made use of thee to ferry her to safety. Thinkest thou she loves thee? Faugh! While thou'rt away she wantons it with every man 'twixt Danby and old Salem Town——'

'Thou liar!' The scandalous words were like to have been Joel's last, for Pelatiah drew his hanger and made for him with intent to stab the slander down his throat with cold steel, but Joel was just a thought too quick.

Before his rival reached him he jerked a pistol from his waistband and let fly, striking Captain Maltby fairly in the chest. Afterwards he boasted that it was a silver bullet he had used, since, as everybody knew, witches, warlocks and were-beasts were impervious to lead, but vulnerable to silver missiles.

However that might be Captain Maltby halted in mid-stride, and his hanger fell with a clatter from his unnerved hand. He hiccupped once and tried to draw a breath that stopped before he had it in, sagged at the knees, fell on his side and died. But with that last unfinished breath they say he whispered, 'Kundre dearest, they have done for me and will for thee if so be that they can. God have thee in His keeping—'

Maltby, of course, was a Protestant, and the only Christian cemetery in the town was Catholic. It was not possible a heretic

should lie in consecrated ground, but the missionary priest took counsel with the rabbi of the little Jewish congregation and arranged to buy a grave-site in the Hebrew burying ground.

There was no ordained minister of his faith to do the final service for Maltby, so the priest and rabbi stood beside his grave, and one said Christian prayers in Latin, and the other Jewish prayers in Hebrew, while the grim-faced sailors from New England stood by and marvelled at this show of charity in those they had been taught to hate, and responded with tear-choked 'A-mens' when prayers were done and time had come to heap the earth upon the body sewn in sailcloth in lieu of a coffin.

It was a Wednesday in mid-April when the killing took place, and Kundre, so the story goes, was sitting beside the brooklet that ran through her back-lot. The weather was unseasonably warm, and her children waded in the stream and searched for buds of ground-rose while she sunned and bleached the hair that was her greatest pride—or vanity, according to the neighbours' wives. Suddenly she raised her head like one who listens to a hail from far away, shook back her clouding hair and cupped one hand to her ear to sit there statue-still for a long moment. Then, with a cry that seemed to be the echo of her riven heart-strings' breaking, she called out, 'Pelatiah! Oh beloved!' and fell forward on her face beside the brooklet, lying with her arms outstretched before her like a diver's when he strikes the water, while her great, heroically-formed body twitched and jerked, and little, dreadful moans came bubbling from her lips, like blood that wells and bubbles from a mortal wound.

Presently she rose and dried her eyes and went into the house where she laid away her gown of crisp blue linen and put on widow's weeds before she sought Ezekiel Martin the stone-mason and ordered him to cut and set a gravestone in the village church-yard. You could see that tombstone now if you should go to Danby burying ground. It reads:

Sacred to the memory of
PELATIAH MALTBY
 Chriftian man & feacaptain
 Moft foully done to death by jealoufie
 at Tamatave in Madagafcie .

Now, you'll allow it would be cause for comment, even in these days when extrasensory perceptions are taken as more or less established facts, for a woman to become aware of her husband's death half-way round the world from her at the very moment

of its happening. The circumstances caused comment in mid-seventeenth century New England, too, but not at all of the same kind. Everybody dreaded sorcery and witchcraft then, and in every unexplained occurrence men saw Satan's ungloved hand. So when Kundre went forth in her mourning clothes, sorrowing dry-eyed at the empty grave where she had placed the tombstone, neighbours looked at her from beneath lowered lids, and when she went to divine service at the meeting house the tithing man went past her hurriedly, and hardly paused to hold the alms basin before her, though he knew it would be heavier by a gold piece minted with the symbol of King Charles' majesty when he withdrew it.

In August came the *Bountiful Adventure* with her ensign flying at half-mast, and Captain Maltby's death was confirmed by the sorrowing seamen.

But what became of Captain Joel Newton and his ship the *Crystal Wave* nobody ever knew. He had set sail from Tamatava the same day he shot Maltby, for everyone agreed he had provoked the quarrel, and the commandant of the garrison threatened his arrest unless he drew his anchor from the harbour-mud at once. The rest was silence. Neither stick nor spar nor broken bit of wreckage ever washed ashore to show the *Crystal Wave's* fate, or that of Captain Joel Newton and the twenty seamen of his crew.

Voyages of a year or even two years were the rule those days, and it was not until King Charles had been beheaded and the Lord Protector proclaimed that Abigail Newton descended from the 'widow's watch' that topped her square-roofed house beside the harbour and changed her home-spun gown of blue for one of black linsey woolsey, then sent for Zeke Martin the mason to cut and set a stone in Danby churchyard.

The twenty widows of the *Crystal Wave's* crew also went in mourning, and bewailed their joint and several losses piteously. When they passed Kundre in the street they looked away, but when she'd gotten safely past they spit upon the ground and muttered 'witch!' and 'Devil's-hag!'

Kundre was a Swedish woman, and though the good folk of Danby had small use for King James's politics and even less for his religion, they were with him to a man in his views on witchcraft. Moreover, they recalled how Scandinavian witches had raised storms and tempests to prevent the Princess Anne from reaching Scotland where her marriage to King James was to be solemnized, and some of the more learned in the village knew the legends of *Sangreal* and remembered that the temptress who all but kept the Holy Grail from Parsifal was named Kundry. There seemed little difference between her name and Kundre's. Kundry of the

legend was a witch damned past redemption, might not Kundre—the strange outland woman who knew of her husband's death four months before the news came home—also be a potent witch?

It seemed entirely possible and even probable, and when the widowed Abigail met widowed Kundre in the village street and taxed her with destroying both the *Crystal Wave's* master and crew by witchcraft, something happened to confirm the worst suspicions.

'Thou art a wicked, Devil-vowed and wanton witch!' said Abigail in hearing of at least three neighbour women. 'By thy vile arts thou raised a monstrous storm and sank the *Crystal Wave* and all her people in the ocean.'

Kundre looked at her, and in her ice-blue eyes there seemed to kindle a slow light like that which the aurora borealis makes on winter nights. 'Thy tongue is dipped in venom like a serpent's, Goody Newton,' she replied in the deep voice which was her Nordic heritage. 'It never wags except to hurt thy neighbours, so 'twere best thou never used it hereafter.'

Whether from the look in Kundre's eyes, or from astonishment that anyone should dare to tell her to keep still we do not know, but it was amply attested that Abigail for once had no reply to make, and we find in the old town records of Danby that on the evening after this encounter she lost her power of speech completely. More, she lost the use of her tongue, for it swelled and swelled until she could not keep it in her mouth, and she could take no nourishment but liquids, and those with greatest difficulty.

In the light of present-day medical knowledge it would not be too difficult to attribute her misfortune to that rare condition known as macroglossia or hypertrophy of the tongue, which doctors tell us is due to engorgement and dilation of the lymph channels. Most of us who have served in hospitals have seen such cases, where the swollen tongue hangs from the mouth and gives the patient a peculiarly idiotic look. But medicine was far from an exact science those days, and besides there was the testimony of the women who had seen the curse of silence laid on Abigail. Three hours after sunset Kundre was 'spoken against' as a witch and duly lodged in Danby jail.

By the common law of England torture was forbidden to force a prisoner to accuse himself, but by the witchcraft statutes of King James certain "tests" which differed from torture neither in degree nor kind were permitted. One of these was known as "swimming," for it was believed a witch's body was so buoyed up with evil that it could not sink in water.

Accordingly, upon the second day of her confinement Kundre was brought out to be "swum." Stripped to her shift they led her from the jail to the horse-pond which served the village as reservoir and ornamental lake at once, forced her to sit cross-legged on the ground and tied her right thumb to her left great toe, her right great toe to her left thumb with heavy linen thread which had been waxed for greater strength, and to make it cut more deeply in the tender flesh. Then over her they dropped a linen bed-sheet, tumbled her all helpless as she was upon her side and tied the sheet's loose ends together, exactly as a modern housewife makes a laundry bundle ready. A rope was fastened to the knotted sheet and willing hands laid hold on it and dragged it out into the water.

Now here we have a choice between the natural and the supernatural. We have all seen the properties of wet cloth to retain the air and resist water. The device known as water wings with which so many children learn to swim is simply a cloth bladder wet before inflation, and as long as outside pressure is evenly applied it will support surprisingly large weights in calm water.

Perhaps it was as natural a phenomenon as this that kept the accused woman afloat on the calm surface of the village horse-pond. Perhaps, again, it was something more sinister. At any rate, the sheeted bundle bobbed and floated on the quiet surface of the pool as easily as if it had been filled with cork, and a great shout went up from the spectators 'She swims! She swims; it is the judgement of just Heaven; she is a proven witch!'

Her trial lasted a full day, and people came from miles about to hear the evidence poured on her. Ezekiel Martin the stonemason told how she came to him and ordered him to cut the tombstone for a man whose limbs were scarcely stiff in death, though none could know that he had died until his ship came a full four months later.

There was no dearth of testimony concerning the fine winds and weather that had been her husband's portion since he married her, or concerning the storms that had plagued his rivals.

Abigail Newton stood up in court that all might see her swollen tongue, and though she could not speak, she went through an elaborate dumb-show of the way the curse had been laid on her. Less reticent, Flee-from-the-Wrath-to-Come Epsworth, Rebecca Norris and Susan Clayton told under oath how they had seen and heard Kundre strike Abigail with speechlessness.

A tithe of such evidence would have been enough to hang her, and the jury took but fifteen minutes to deliberate upon their

verdict, which, of course, was guilty.

Asked what she had to say in her defence before the court pronounced sentence, she made a seemly curtsy to the judge and answered without hesitation 'Tis true I am a witch as ye have charged me. Long years ago, my sire and dam made compact with the Prince of Evil and bound me by their covenant, but never have I used my power to hurt a living creature, brute or human. That I should wish my man to prosper was but natural. Thus far I used my power over wind and tides, but no farther. Whether Heaven punished Goodman Newton for the foul murder that he did on my poor man I cannot say. I know naught of the matter, nor did I lift a finger to bring Heaven's retribution on him. "Vengeance is mine, I will repay," saith the Lord.

'As for the swollen tongue of von shrew, belike it is the malice of her black and jealous heart that bloats it. As to that I cannot answer; but hark ye, neighbours, if I had the power to release her I'd not use it. The town is better for her silence, as I wis ye all agree.'

With that she made another curtsy to the judge and stood there silent, waiting sentence: 'Since, therefore, Goodwife Kundre Maltby hath by her own confession admitted she was justly tried and convicted, so let her on account of her bond with the Devil and on account of the witchcraft she hath practised, be hanged by the neck until she be dead.'

The usual formula in hanging cases was for the court to add, 'and may God have mercy on thy soul,' but such a sentiment seemed obviously out of place here, and the judge forbore to express it.

They carried out the sentence next day, and a mighty crowd was gathered for the spectacle. The members of the trained band were much put to it to control the rabble when the hangman drove his cart beneath the gallows tree and made the hemp fast to her neck.

She wore her widow's weeds to execution, and round her neck was clasped a slender chain of some base metal with a flat pendant like a coin hung from it. It was the only ornament she'd had when Pelatiah found her floating on the grating, and she had laid it by when they were married. Now, through a whim, perhaps, she chose to wear it at her death.

They'd let her children visit her in jail the night before, and she had sent the girl back for the bauble. 'Look well on it, my sweet,' she told the child when it was clasped about her neck. 'The time may come when thou'lt have need of it, and if it comes thou shalt not cry for it in vain.'

As the hangman bound her elbows to her sides before he slip-

ped the noose beneath her chin she begged him, 'Leave the worthless chain in place when thy grim task is done, good Peter Grimes. In my left shoe thou'lt find a golden sovereign hidden to repay thee for thy work. Take it and welcome, but if thou take'st the chain and pendant from me—a witch's curse shall be on thee.'

Peter Grimes was a poor man, and the clothes a felon stood in when he died were part of his perquisites, but he had no stomach for a witch's curse, so when he found the gold piece in her shoe as she had promised he took it and was well pleased to leave the worthless chain in place.

She did not die easily, from all accounts. Her splendid body was too powerful, the tide of life ran too strong in her, so she dangled, quivering and writhing in the air a full five minutes. Then Peter Grimes, perhaps in charity, perhaps because he wished to have the business over with and go home to his breakfast, seized her by the legs and dragged until the double burden of his weight and hers proved too much for her spinal column, and with a snapping like the cracking of a fire-dried stick her neck broke and her struggles ended.

They raised the stone that she had set above her husband's empty grave, scooped out a shallow opening beneath it and dropped her in, coffinless and without proper graveclothes. So, as the neighbours sagely said, she had outreached herself and ordered her own tombstone when by her wicked wizardry she had the tidings of her man's death at the instant it occurred.

And here again we're forced to make a choice between the natural and the supernatural. That Kunder should have confessed she was guilty was not particularly important. We know that under heavy mental stress people will accuse themselves of almost any crime. There's hardly a sensational murder case in which the police don't have to deal with numerous entirely innocent self-accusers. That part of it is understandable.

What is more difficult to explain is that at the very moment Peter Grimes broke Kunder's neck the swelling in Abigail Newton's tongue began to subside, and by noon she had entirely regained the power of speech. Indeed, she regained it so fully that within six months she was twice sentenced to the ducking-stool for public scoldings, and finally was forced to stand before the meeting house on the Sabbath with a muzzle on her face and a paper reading 'Common Scold' hung by a string around her neck.

Not the least mystifying thing about the mystery of Kunder Maltby was the way her fortune disappeared. That she and Pelatiah had been rich was common knowledge, but when the asses-

sors went to her house to take her property in custody they could find nothing of substantial value. Not a single gold or silver coin, nor yet a bit of jewellery could they turn up, though they searched the place from cellar to ridgepole and even knocked down several walls in quest of concealed hiding places. So, balked in the attempt to work a forfeiture of her fortune, they sold the house and land at public vendue, put the proceeds in the town treasury and farmed the children out to be taught useful trades.

Micah was apprenticed at the rope-walk owned by Goodman Richard Belkton, Kundre took her place among the sewing maids of Goodwife Deborah Stiles, and except when they were in school or went, well chaperoned, to divine service at the meeting house, they never saw each other.

Their lot was not a happy one. We all know the sadistic cruelty of the young. The lad who goes to a new school today has a hard time until he's proved himself to be the equal of the class bully, or till the novelty of hazing him wears off. But Kundre and her brother had to face the taunts and insults of their classmates endlessly. No one wished to sit with them or share a hornbook with them. If, maddened by the spiteful things said of his mother, Micah fought his tormentor and came off winner, his victory was vociferously attributed to witchcraft. If he lost the fight the victor called on all to witness how Heaven had helped the right in overcoming evil.

Both were apt pupils, but their readiness in reading, ciphering and writing caused no commendation from the schoolma'am. She too believed their aptitude infernally inspired and made no secret of it. So successful recitations were rewarded by an acid reference to their mother's compact with the Evil One. Failure brought a caning.

In all the dreary monotone of life the one highlight for Kundre was Hosea Newton. It may seem strange that the son of her mother's fiercest persecutor should prove her only friend, but it was no stranger than the contrast between Hosea and his mother. Where she was angular and acid and sharp-tongued he was inclined to plumpness, slow of speech and even-tempered. When all the little girls drew their skirts back from Kundre as from diabolic pollution, he chose a seat beside her on the form, and shared his primer with her and, to the scandal of the class, often gave her tidbits from the ample luncheon which his mother packed for him each morning. When Charity Wilkins accused Kundre of stealing a new thimble from her he found the missing bauble concealed in Charity's pocket and pulled her hair until she

admitted her fault. Charity's big brother Benjamin took up the lists for his sister, whereupon Hosea entered combat with enthusiasm and left Benjamin with a bloody nose and greatly chastened tongue.

But this little interlude of friendship had disastrous results. Goodwife Wilkins went to Abigail, who, horrified that her son had espoused the witch-child's cause, took him forthwith to Reverend Silas Middleton, who quoted Scriptural texts to him—'Evil communications corrupt good manners'—exhorted him, prayed over him and finally caned him soundly.

After that Hosea had to content himself with smiling at Kundre over his primer. All speech between them was forbidden, and though the Reverend Middleton's precepts had made but small impression on Hosea, he had a vivid memory of the thrashing that accompanied them.

The quiet of the lazy years flowed over Danby like a placid river. In the harbour the tall ships shook out their wings and sped to the far corners of the earth and presently came back again with holds filled with strange merchandise. Or perhaps they did not come back, and the women put on mourning clothes and there were new stones in the churchyard, with empty graves beneath them. King Philip's War was fought and won and the settlers needed to fear Indian raids no longer. But in the main life just went on and on. Its groove was deepened, but the course and pattern never changed.

Hosea Newton went away to Harvard College where he was to be trained for the ministry, Micah worked at the rope-walk, harbouring black resentment in his heart, but not daring to give tongue to it; Kundre toiled in Goody Stiles's workroom from sunrise to sunset. She proved a clever needle-woman and her work was eagerly bought up, but had no credit for it. Goodwife Stiles displayed the dresses proudly, and accepted compliments with modest grace, but she never told whose agile fingers fashioned them. In this she showed sound business sense, for many of her customers would have hesitated to wear garments made by a witch-child. And then—

One evening in late summer Kundre lay in Goodman Stiles's oat field. She had worked all day, her eyes and muscles ached, and she was so tired that she could have cried with it, but now she had a little respite. The earth felt warm and comforting to her cramped muscles, she seemed to draw vitality from it while a little breeze played through the bearded grain, making it rustle softly, like a bride's dress.

A bride's dress! Kundre thought. Other maids went to the meeting house or stood up in their own homes in stiff, rustling taffety while the parson joined them to the men of their choice. Was she forever doomed to tread the earth in loneliness, to find no lover, no friend, even, in the whole world? It seemed a hard fate for a maid as well-favoured as she.

Kundre knew that she had beauty. Unlike her mother, she was little; little and slender with grey eyes and a soft-lipped, rather sad smile. Her hair, despite the severe braids in which she wore it, was positively thrilling in its beauty. Paler than her mother's, it had the sweet amber-gold of melted honey in dark lights and the vivid sheen of burnished silver when the sunshine fell on it. There was a sort of aristocratic fragility hinted at by her arched, slender neck and delicately-cut profile, her hands were so slight that she wore child's mittens in cold weather, and the cast-off shoon of neighbours' half-grown daughters were too large for her, even when she wore the thickest woollen stockings.

But now she had kicked off the rough brogans and stripped the heavy cotton stockings off and drew her naked, gleaming feet up under her as she half sat, half lay upon the warm and friendly earth. She rested her elbow upon a bent knee, outlining her chin with her fingers as she looked toward the blue, distant hills. How would it seem, she wondered, to have someone look at her in friendship, speak a kindly word to her, perhaps—her pulses quickened at the daring thought—tell her she was beautiful?

A footstep sounded at the margin of the field and she crouched like a little partridge when it hears the hunter coming. If she were very still, perhaps whoever came would pass her by unseeing. She had no wish to be seen. Since early childhood she had never known a friendly look or word, except—

The footsteps came still nearer, swishing through the nodding grain, and now she heard a man's voice humming softly :

*Wish and fulfilment can severed be ne'er,
Nor the thing prayed for come short of the prayer—*

'I crave thy pardon, mistress!' Unaware of Kundre crouching in her covert he had almost trodden on her. A flush suffused his face as he stepped backward hurriedly and almost lost his balance in the process.

'I had no business trespassing on Neighbour Stiles's land—why, Kundre, lass, is't truly thou? How lovely thou art grown!' he broke off in surprised delight and to her utter blank amazement, dropped

down to the ground beside her. 'It must be full three years since I have seen thee,' he added.

Kundre looked at him in wonder. At first it had been but a man she saw, and men, almost as much as women, were her natural enemies, for she had led an odd and hunted life, and like an animal knew the world of men and women only through the blows it dealt her. But as she looked into the smiling friendly face she felt the blood flow into her cheeks and bring sudden warmth to her brow, for it was Hosea Newton sitting by her in the oat field, Hosea Newton's voice, all rich with friendly laughter, asked how she did, and—her heart beat so that she could hardly breathe—Hosea Newton has just said that she was lovely.

The years had been kind to him. Strongly made, wide-shouldered, he was still not burly, only big; and his face was undeniably handsome. He had a short upper lip and a square jaw with a dimple in it, blue eyes set wide apart beneath dark, curving brows, and lightly curling dark hair that fitted his well-formed head like a cap.

'Art glad to see me?' he asked frankly, and Kundre sat in thoughtful silence for a while before she answered softly:

'I am not sure, Hosea. In all the world thou art the only person who has spoken kindly to me since my mother—died—but once, I recollect, thou suffered for thy kindness to me. Now—'

'Now,' he mimicked laughing, 'I'll dare the parson or the elders to admonish me. I am my own man, Kundre, and think what thoughts I choose, say what I will and go with whom I please. Aye,' he added as she answered nothing. 'I've thought a deal about things, Kundre, and what I think might not make pleasant hearing for the parson and the elders, or my mother, either. I've seen the Quakers whipped and hanged and branded for their faith's sake, seen helpless, innocent old women go tottering to the gallows tree for witchcraft that they never worked, and could not work, and seen the men who call themselves God's ministers work lustily in Satan's vineyard.'

'Thou thinkest, then—' she asked him with a quaver in her voice—'it may be possible my mother was no witch—'

'No more a witch than any other,' he replied. 'Though I speak of the flesh that bore me, I say that those who swore her life away are tainted with the blood of innocence—why, Kundre, lass, what aileth thee?'

The girl had flung her arms about him and was sobbing out her heart against his shoulder. For almost twenty years she'd led a pariah's life, hounded, scorned and persecuted, and the memory of her mother had been rubbed into her breaking heart like salt in a

raw wound. Now here at last was one who had a kind word for her mother, who dared suggest she had not merited a felon's shameful death.

What happened then was like a chemical reaction in its spontaneity. It may have been that pity which is said to be akin to love inspired him to put his arms about her as she sobbed against his shoulder, but in the fraction of a heart-beat there was no questioning the emotion that possessed him. From him to her, and from her to him, there seemed to flow a mystic fluid—a sort of intangible soul-substance—that met and mingled like the waters of two rivers at their confluence and merged them into each other until they were not twain, but one.

It was an odd idyll, this romance of a man whose childhood had been spent in the house with a bawling woman and this woman whose whole life had been warped by hatred and suspicion. To say that they loved at first sight would not be accurate. Each had carried the image of the other in his heart since childhood, in each the thought of the other had been present constantly, not consciously, any more than they were conscious of the hearts that beat beneath their breasts, but always there, the greatest, most important, most vital thing in either of their lives. Now they were aware of it with blinding, dazzling suddenness. The glory of it almost stunned them.

Every evening when her work for Goody Stiles was done Kundre hurried to the oat field, and always he was there to greet her and come hurrying with uplifted hands to take her in his arms.

Judged by modern free-and-easy standards they were inhibited in their love-making. They hardly kissed at all, and when they did it was a chaste embrace which brother and sister might have exchanged. But she would put her hand in his and turn it till her soft palm rested on his and her little fingers made a soft and gentle pattern of his own, then rest her head against his shoulder till her gleaming hair was on his cheek, its perfume fresh and sweet as that of the green growing things about them.

I said theirs was an odd love. So it was. A love compounded partly of loneliness, partly of heart-hunger, partly of true, honest friendship; not without its moments of passion, but entirely without the savage, selfish hunger of passion; not lacking ecstasy, but with the ecstasy of love fulfilled, not satiated.

They did not talk much. There was small need of words, for that mysterious warm current, strong as a rising ocean tide, flowed constantly between them, fusing their two selves in one.

And when they came to say good night the sweet pain of their parting was itself a compensation for the day-long separation facing them.

Then came catastrophe, as dreadful and as unexpected as a thunder-bolt hurled from a cloudless sky. Her brother Micah ran away from his master. It was either flight or murder, for despite the expert way in which he did his work old Goodman Belkton found fault with him constantly, and his fellow 'prentices, not slow to take their cue from the master, taunted him with his mother's conviction and intimated that he used her devilish arts to make his handiwork the best the 'walk turned out.

Runaway apprentices were fair game for anyone, and Goodman Belkton offered a reward of two pounds for the stray's return, so when four sturdy louts saw Micah on the dock at Salem Town, about to sign before the mast for a voyage in the Indies, they set on him and bound him with a length of rope and dragged him back to Danby.

But while they were still in the Danby suburbs they had been set upon by a ferocious heifer that gored one of them sorely, knocked down another, and put them all so utterly to flight that their prisoner escaped and joined his ship at Salem before she sailed with the tide. They brought their wounded comrade into Danby, where, over sundry mugs of potent rum-and-water, they had a wondrous story to relate.

The cow that set on them had been no ordinary cow, it seemed, but a demon beast whose nostrils breathed forth fiery flames, and which announced *in human words*, 'I'll soon set thee free from this scum, my brother!'

This all happened in the early evening, but before it was too dark for them to see the demon beast go tearing off across a meadow when its fell work had been done and suddenly sit down upon the sod like a woman, straddle a long fence-rail like a witch that mounts a broom, and fly shrieking off across the sky toward Goodman Stiles's oat field.

And where had Kundre been while this was happening? Her mistress asked her pointblank, and pointblank she refused to answer. And there the matter might have rested, perhaps, if Jonathan Sawyer, a labourer of Goodman Williams' plantation, had not volunteered the information that at nine o'clock the night before he's seen her hurrying from Stiles's oat field and heard her singing something not to be found in the hymn book.

It seemed hardly necessary for the constable to call a *posse comitans* of trained bandsmen to arrest her or to summon Parson Middleton to lend them spiritual assistance. But so he did, and

with martial clank of sword and pike and musket, and with the Parson with his Book beneath his arm, they went to Goodwife Stiles's house and formally took Kundre into custody, bound her wrists together with the constable's spare bridle, put a horse's leading-strap about her neck and marched her through the streets to Danby jail, where they lodged her with a double guard before the door.

Hosea Newton roused from a deep, dream-tormented sleep, completely conscious, every faculty alert. His room was buried in a darkness blinding as a black cloak, for the moon had set long since, and a cloud-veil obscured the stars. Some instinct, some sentinel of the spirit that stands watch while we are sleeping, told him he was not alone, but he could see or hear nothing.

All day he'd raged through Danby Town like a madman, calling on the parson and the constable and even the high magistrate to intercede for Kundre. She was no witch, he vowed, but a sweet, pure maid who held his heart in the cupped palms of her two little hands. The ruffians who had told the story of the demon heifer were a lot of drunken, craven liars, seeking to excuse their prisoner's escape with this wild tale. He'd prove it; he would range the countryside until he'd found the cow that bested them and lead her singlehanded to the pound for all to see she was a natural beast.

The parson and the constable and magistrate were sympathetic listeners, but one and all refused to help in his trouble. The woman was a witch, the vowed and dedicated votary of Satan—like mother, like daughter. Could any natural cow put four strong men to flight, and they all armed with stout cudgels? And, most especially, could a natural beast bestride a fence-rail and sail through the sky on it? 'Poor boy, thou art bewitched by this vile whelp from Satan's kennels,' they told him.

'But fear not, poor, befuddled lad, tomorrow we shall prove that thy infatuation is the devil's work, for on the town common at sunrise we shall prick the witchling with long pins until we find the devil's mark, and thou shalt see she is in very truth a servant of the Prince of Darkness.'

He'd tried to see her in the jail, but the trained bandsmen turned him back. No one must see the witch until she had passed through the ordeal, even the turnkey was forbidden to go near her or to look into her cell. How should she eat and wherewith should she quench her thirst? Let Beelzebub her master see to that. They were Christian men and had no traffic with the servants of Satan.

Finally, worn out in body and in spirit, he had come home, refused his supper—could he take food while Kundre starved?—and thrown himself upon his bed, full-dressed, to fall into a sleep of utter exhaustion.

Desperate men make desperate plans, and Hosea was desperate. It did not matter to him whether she were good of bad or innocent or guilty. He loved her and would not desert her. If the court found her guilty—and accusation was equivalent to conviction—he would denounce himself as a wizard, and hang with her upon the gallows tree. She should not go to that dark land beyond the grave alone.

What was it? Something stirred in the soft darkness of the room; a shadow moving in the shadows, a rat that came to forage in the dark?

He knew that it was none of these, for in the gloom that blotted out the outlines of the furniture he saw a gleam of light, or rather lightness, like a cloud of faintly luminous vapour swirling from an unseen boiling kettle.

Slowly it spread, wafting upward, and now he saw the outlines of a figure in it, and the blood churned in his ears, his throat grew tight, and at the pit of his stomach he seemed to feel a burning and a freezing, all at once.

'Who—what art thou?' he croaked hoarsely, and the sound of his own frightened voice was terrifying in the haunted darkness.

No answer came to his challenge, but the figure looming faintly in the mist-cloud seemed taking on a kind of substance. Now he could see it quite clearly, and the terror which engulfed him seemed to be an icy flood that paralyzed his heart and brain and muscles.

Yet notwithstanding his terror he felt a kind of admiration for the phantom. It was a woman, tall as a tall man, yet with a calm and regal beauty wholly feminine. Across the low white brow a spate of gold-hued hair fell flowing to her knees, and from the perfect contour of her face great eyes of zenith-blue looked at him under brows of startling blackness. She was dressed in widow's weeds: a chain and pendant of some dull, lack-lustre metal hung about her throat.

He knew her! He has been a little lad scarce eight years old when Goodman Stiles had raised him to his shoulder that he might see the hangman Peter Grimes work the court's sentence on Kundre Maltby, the witch-woman. With a sudden pang of recollection he recalled how he had thought it a great pity that so much beauty should be vowed to Satan and hanged upon the gallows tree and entombed in the earth.

'What—' by supreme effort he forced speech between palsied lips—'what wouldst thou with me, Kundre Maltby?'

'Wilt take my help, Hosea Newton?' asked the spectre, and her voice was cold and desolate as December storm-wind blowing over pine-capped hills.

Hosea hesitated in his answer, and well he might. The wraith, if wraith it were, was that of a condemned witch-woman, hanged for sorcery, and, presumably, made fast in hell. He might have been in advance of his time, but he was part and parcel of his generation, and since Deuteronomy was penned men had regarded witches as disciples of the Evil One. To traffic with them was forbidden under pain of death and loss of soul. This was a witch's ghost, as dreadful as the witch herself, perhaps more dreadful, since she had burned in hell for twenty years, and he must make the choice of taking aid from her or bidding her begone. There was no middle course; he must hold true to all the teachings that had been instilled in him since infancy and bid her avaunt, or make compromise with Evil incarnate and put his soul in dreadful jeopardy—to what end? Did not the writings of the Fathers teach that Satan is the arch-deceiver? Would he keep the compact offered by this messenger from hell?

Then came the thought of Kundre, little Kundre, starved and thirsting, languishing in prison till the morrow, when they'd strip her to her shift in sight of all the town and pierce her tender flesh with long, cruel pins—a thousand thousand years of burning hell would be a bargain-price to pay for her deliverance.

'Say on, O spirit of my Kundre's mother,' he commanded. 'I'll take the help thou offerest me, and pay the price thou asketh.'

The phantom raised one white, almost transparent hand and loosed the medal from its neck. 'Take this,' it bade, and it seemed that its ghostly voice was stronger, warmer. 'Hie with it to the jail house and cut away the bars that pen her in. Then fly across the border southward—my time is sped, I must e'en go!'

The voice stopped suddenly, as though a hand had been laid on the spectre's throat, and like an April snowflake melting in the rising sun of spring, the faintly-shining vision merged back in the darkness.

He could not say if it had been a vivid dream or if a visitant had come to him, but presently he rose and struck a flint-spark in his tinderbox and lit a tallow dip. There on the floor beside his bed lay a medallion of dull metal, not lead nor iron, but apparently a mixture of the two, fixed to a length of slender chain of the same sheenless substance. Curiously, he noted that his hands were soiled with fresh earth and his fingernails broken, as though he

had been burrowing like a woodchuck. Yet he knew he had not left his chamber since he flung himself upon the bed and fell asleep.

Or had he? We may wonder. Might he not have been the victim of somnambulism, and risen to go scraping at the earth that covered Kunder Maltby's body in the churchyard, then, still asleep, come back with the mysterious medal? The thought did not occur to him, but in the light of modern psychological experiments we may entertain it.

At any rate he recognized the medallion and took it in his hand. It was quite plain on one side and engraved with characters he could not read upon the other. Its edge was rounded like that of a milled coin, and though it was no larger than a penny it weighed as much as a gold sovereign.

What was it that the ghost had ordered him to do? 'Hie with it to the jail house and cut away the bars that pen her in.'

With this dull piece of soft metal? He was about to fling the medal from him in disgust when the echo of the ghostly voice seemed coming to him through the candlelight-stained darkness. 'Hurry, hurry, lover of the falsely-accused, or it will be too late!'

He knew what cell they'd lodged her in, the same in which her mother languished twenty years ago. It was on the ground floor of the prison, and by standing on his tiptoes he could look through the barred window.

If they caught him skulking round the jail house—What matter? He was resolved to die with her, why not share prison with her ere they hanged him?

Danby jail loomed dimly, a darker darkness in the starless night, as Hosea approached it, treading noiselessly in stockinged feet. 'Kunder,' he whispered softly as he tapped upon the stone sill of her cell window. 'Can'st hear me, dearest love?'

'Is't thou, my very dearest?' the girl's reply came to him through the formless darkness. 'Oh, Hosea—' He heard her sobs, the small, sad sounds of utter misery, as her voice broke.

'Aye, heart o' mine, 'tis I, and I have come to tell thee that thou shalt not go alone—come closer, love, stretch out thy hands to me—'

'I cannot, dearest one; they've chained me to the wall as if I were a rabid cur—'

Hosea clenched his teeth in fury and, unthinking, drove his hand against the prison bars. It was the hand in which he clasped the witch's medal, and as it struck the bar he drew back with a startled exclamation. The heavy, hand-forged iron had

melted from contact with the medal as if it had been tallow touched by flame.

In a moment he was sawing at the window-bars with the mysterious coin, cutting them away as if they had been cheese. Silently he laid them on the turf outside the prison window, then, when he had an opening large enough to crawl through, let himself inside the cell and felt his way toward her.

They wasted no time in reunion or premature rejoicings. With her hand on his to guide it he pressed the witch's coin against the iron collar locked around her neck, and laid the fetter on the straw-strewn cell floor carefully, lest its clanking rouse the guard who waited in the corridor outside. Then, step by cautious step, he led her to the window.

Hand in hand they crept along the shadowed street until they reached the stable where his mother's horses stamped before their mangers. In a moment he had saddled the best beast and led it out, swung her to the saddle-bow before him and set out toward the southern boundary of the town. They dared not trot or gallop lest the pounding of the horse's hoofs arouse the neighbours, but presently they reached the churchyard, and he drove his heels into the stallion's flanks.

'Wait, wait, my dear,' she begged him as they passed the white-spired meeting house, 'I would say farewell to my mother ere we shake the dust of Danby from our shoon forever.'

'Aye,' he conceded, lowering her to the ground. 'That is but fitting, sweetling. We are indebted to thy mother for thy liberty tonight.'

Together they walked to the grave, and while the girl knelt on the moss that rimmed the stone he looked down at her pensively. He wondered why his conscience did not trouble him. Tonight he had accepted diabolic aid, made compromise with Evil. Even now he had the witch-wife's medal in his pocket—he drew the flat metallic disc to look at it. Should he take it with him, or return it to the grave? he wondered, then wondered more at what was happening. The coin seem straining at his fingers, as if a thin, invisible thread were pulling it, or it had volition of its own and sought release from his grasp.

But, strangely, the pull was all in one direction, toward the foot of Kundre Maltby's grave.

Wonderingly, he stepped in the direction of the tug, and noticed that it increased sharply, then seemed to bear straight down toward the earth.

He dropped upon his knees. The coin seemed guiding his hand toward the tombstone and, still marvelling, he reached in the

direction that it indicated. His fingers touched the long grass growing by the stone and found an opening like a woodchuck's burrow. Inside was something stiff and hard, yet slightly pliable, like old, oiled leather.

He grasped the object, tugged at it and brought it out. It was a leather sack, well smeared with tallow, stiff with age and long entombment in the earth, but wholly intact. A wax seal held the cord that bound its mouth, but this crumbled as he touched it. Inside were several smaller sacks, some of soft buckskin, some of coarse linen, and in them were bright English sovereigns, round silver Spanish dollars, and gleaming articles of jewellery. The mystery of Kundre Maltby's lost fortune was solved. She had buried it beneath the stone that marked her husband's empty grave, and when they went to scoop the hollow to receive her body they had used only the upper portion of the grave.

Hosea chuckled as he realized what has happened. The diggers' spades had been within a hand's-width of the treasure, yet none had suspected it.

Witchcraft? Perhaps, but very fortunate witchcraft for him and Kundre. A moment since they had had nothing but the clothes they stood in and the stolen stallion; now they were rich. Their life would not be hard—if they could get away.

The night was tiring rapidly as they rode into the woodland. Long streaks of grey were showing in the eastern sky, small noises came to them, the chirp of crickets and the sleepy murmurs of awakening birds, but on and on they rode, secure in the knowledge that Danby jail had no bloodhounds to pursue them, and their escape could not be known till sunrise, for no one, jailer or turnkey or guard, would dare go near the witch's cell till full daylight.

The Newport Quakers greeted them hospitably, and when they found that they had money offered them letters to the first citizens of Philadelphia.

In two days they took passage on a sloop bound for the Delaware, and, once on the high sea, were married by the master. So Kundre Maltby and Hosea Newton, children of seafaring Danby skippers, plighted troth upon the ocean, with the singing of the wind in the rigging for wedding march and the skirling mewl of sea gulls for a prothalamium.

They were not the first, nor, unhappily, the last to be driven from their homes by ignorance and bigotry masquerading as religion, but in Philadelphia they found such peace and happiness as never could have been theirs in New England. Their house stood

on a tall hill overlooking the wide Schuylkill and the prosperous little Quaker city, and there their family multiplied until they had four sons and three daughters.

It was an evening in mid-April, the anniversary of her father's death at Captain Newton's hand, if she had known it, that Kundre stood with Hosea on the porch of their mansion and watched the lights of Philadelphia quench out against the darkness. Honora, their last-born daughter, had been christened in the afternoon, and now, all vestige of original sin washed from her, was slumbering as peacefully as any cherub in the nursery.

'Look, heart of mine,' bade Kundre, 'all those good folk go to their rest down yonder. They are a kind and gentle people, and I know their dreams are of a better world.'

'Aye, dearest,' he slipped an arm round her, 'a better world, in truth. Not in some dim, misty Promised Land on t'other side of Jordan, but here in this same world we live in. There'll come a time, my sweet, when men with lofty dreams shall waken at a great tomorrow's dawn and find their dreams still there, and nothing vanished but the night.'

The Bishop brought his story to a close and looked from Dr Bentley to the younger clergyman with a quizzical twinkle in his eye. 'I shan't ask you to pass judgement,' he said. 'Whether Hosea Newton should have scorned the witch's offer—or whether he received it, for that matter—are purely academic questions today. I'm pretty sure though,' he chuckled, 'that if he had refused it I should not be here this evening.'

'How's that, sir?' asked young Dr Kitteringson.

'Well, you see, Hosea Newton was my great-grandfather, several times removed, and his wife, the witch's child, my ancestress. So was the witch, for that matter.'

'And the witch's coin?' asked Dr Kitteringson. 'Do you know what became of it?'

'Yes,' answered Bishop Chauncey. 'Here it is.' He thrust two fingers in his waistcoat and produced a little metal disc which might have been silver, but it wasn't, flat and plain on one side, marked with faint traces of old Nordic runes upon the other. 'I've carried it as a lucky piece for years,' he added. 'My grandfather carried it all through the Civil War and never had a wound; my father had it with him at San Juan Hill and came off without a scratch. I lugged it through the Argonne and came out safely, but once when I left it on my dressing table in Paris I was run down by a taxi-cab before I had a chance to cross the street.'

Dr. Kitteringson was handling the strange coin gingerly, half

curiously, half fearfully. 'You've tested it for magic powers?' he asked.

'Good gracious, no son. I don't suppose it has any, and—good heavens, look!'

Young Dr Kitteringson had taken up the fire shovel and drawn the coin's blunt edge across its gleaming brass bowl. Where the medal touched the brass it cut a kerf as easily as if it had been pressed through softened tallow.

'Great Scott, Bishop—Dick!' exclaimed Dr Bentley. 'What do you think of that?'

The Bishop dropped the witch's coin back in his waistcoat pocket and held his glass out toward his host. His hand was shaking slightly, but his eyes and voice were steady. 'I think I'd like another drop of brandy; quickly, if you please,' he answered.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Is the Devil a Gentleman? is a question story. Whether Kunder Maltby was a witch at all, whether she appeared as a ghost to her future son-in-law, whether he actually compromised with evil or whether he was the victim of a vivid dream and a case of somnambulism—all these are questions which are continually raised through the course of the story.

Like an advocate, I've merely presented the evidence in the case, but unlike an advocate, I've forbore to argue from the evidence; hence the jury of readers must reach their verdict without help or hints from me.

Background for the story: Turn to page 117 of the Cambridge edition of the poems of John Greenleaf Whittier. There it all is, beautifully outlined for you, except for the Bishop, and the witch's coin and a few little things which I thought up myself.

SEABURY QUINN

FRANCE—THE HOME OF BLACK MAGIC

'From the thirteenth century downwards, Southern France was regarded as the nursery of heresy and the Black Art, to which its location on the Mediterranean and in the vicinity of Spain particularly contributed—Spain being regarded as the proscribed land of magic and Saracenic heresy. Thus the oldest relation of the Witch Sabbath lays the scene of it in Southern France; and Alphonso de Spina records that proselyted women in Dauphiné were seduced by the devil by night into a wilderness where they worshipped a he-goat upon a rock by torchlight. The notorious Witch Sabbath of Arras in 1495, at about which time de Spina lived, was frequented by men, while in the more ancient times it was only resorted to by women. This celebration continued in France, especially in the Southern provinces, for many centuries. In the reign of Charles IX, the great sorcerer so much dreaded, Rinaldo des Trois Echelles, was executed, and he said undauntedly before the King that in France he had three hundred thousand confederates, all of whom they could not commit to the flames as they did him.'

C. L. ENNESMOSER,
The History of Magic

Monsieur seeks a Wife

MARGARET IRWIN

Note.—The following story is an extract from the private memoirs of Monsieur de St. Aignan, a French nobleman living in the first half of the eighteenth century.

I was twenty-four years of age when I returned in 1723 at the end of my three years' sojourn at the English Court, and had still to consider the question of my marriage. My father sent for me soon after my return and asked if I had yet given any thought to the matter. I replied that as a dutiful son I had felt it would be unnecessary and impertinent to do so. My father was sitting in his gown without his wig, for the day was hot, and as he sipped his chocolate he kept muttering, 'Too good—too good by half.'

I flicked my boots with my whip and did my best to conceal my impatience, for there was a hunt in the woods at Meudon and I feared I might miss it.

Presently he said, 'There was no one in England with whom you might have wished to form an alliance?'

'No, sir. The English actresses are charming.'

This time he seemed better pleased for he repeated, 'Good, good. That is an admirable safeguard to your filial duty in marriage.'

He then threw me over a letter from an old friend of his, the Comte de Riennes, a man of little fortune but of one of the oldest families in the kingdom. I skimmed two pages of compliments and salutations which seemed tedious to me after the shorter style of English correspondence, and got to the body of the letter. It was in answer to a proposal from my father that the two houses should be united by my marriage with one of the three daughters of the Comte.

He expressed warmly his gratitude and pleasure and told my

father that as he had only enough fortune to bestow a *dot* on one of his daughters, the two others would enter a convent as soon as their sister was married; the choice of the bride he very magnanimously left to my father, and my father with equal magnanimity now left it to me. As I had seen and heard of none of them, I was perfectly indifferent.

‘My motives are entirely disinterested,’ I said to my father. ‘I only wish to make a match that will be in accordance with your wishes and those of such an old friend of the family as Monsieur le Comte de Riennes. We had better therefore refer the choice back to him.’

As I said this, I turned the last page of the letter, and saw that Monsieur le Comte suggested that I should pay a visit to the Château de Riennes in the country of the Juras and see the three daughters for myself before deciding which I should marry. The generosity of this offer struck me forcibly and I at once accepted it. My father also remarked on the openness and liberality of his old friend, and observed that as in the usual course the eldest would have been appointed to the marriage, it would show justice and delicacy in me to choose her, unless of course she had a hump back or some other deformity; ‘though in that case,’ he remarked, ‘she would surely have been placed in a convent long before.’

I went out to find that I was too late for the hunt at Meudon. It was the Regent* who informed me of this, for I met him strolling up and down one of the corridors in the palace and gazing out of the windows for all the world like an idle lackey. He was then very near the end of his life, though he was not old, and I remember being struck by his bloated aspect and thinking to myself, ‘If that man should have a fit, I would not bet a button on his life.’

He did me the honour to ask me many questions about England, especially the rapid advance of scientific discovery in which he took a great interest.

‘How times have changed!’ he remarked. ‘When I was young, I was regarded as a monster and a poisoner because I was an atheist and dabbled in chemistry. Also in black magic; it was the fashion then,’ he added. ‘One must have some superstition, though I dare say you find it inconsistent to discard the superstition of religion, yet to retain that of sorcery.’

As he likes nothing so much as plain speaking, I owned to this, and added in explanation that in England the superstition of magic had for some time been confined to the ignorant and vulgar.

* Duke of Orleans, Regent of France during the minority of Louis XV.

He then remarked on my approaching marriage (for my father had spoken of it to him) and, turning back just as he was leaving me, he said, 'The French Juras were a dangerous country once. Take care of yourself there.'

His voice always sounded as though he were joking, but his melancholy and bloodshot eyes looked serious. I knew that a savage country like the Juras was likely to be infested with robbers, but I should ride well attended and said so. The Regent only smiled, and it suddenly struck me as he walked away that the danger he was thinking of was not connected with robbers, and I could not guess what it was. I did not see him again before his sudden death, and three days later I set out on my journey.

The roads were bad and the inns worse, and I thought with regret of England, which seemed, especially at the worst inn, to be my adopted country. After an endless and dreary plain cultivated by wretched peasantry, I saw the rugged shapes of the Jura mountains against the sky and knew I was reaching my journey's end. The next day our horses were toiling steadily uphill, and the road was rougher, the countryside more deserted than ever. We entered a forest of dark pine trees which shed a gloomy twilight over our path, for it could now only by courtesy be termed a road. I began to be certain that we had missed our way, when I saw a creature approaching us who seemed to be human more from his upright position on two legs than from anything else in his appearance. I asked if we were on the road for Riennes, and though we had the greatest difficulty in understanding his dialect, it was at last clear that we were. He seemed, however, to be warning us not to take the wrong path farther on, and walked back a little way in order, I supposed, to direct us.

I dropped him some money for his trouble and he then repeated his warnings with what struck me as extraordinary urgency and even anxiety. He talked faster and more unintelligibly until the only word I could be certain of was the continual repetition of the name 'Riennes,' and he wagged his shaggy beard and rolled his eyes as he said it, with an expression that seemed positively that of fear or horror. I concluded that he was probably half-witted, and threw him another coin to get rid of him. At this he laid hold on my bridle and said two or three times, very slowly and as distinctly as he could. 'Do not go to Riennes.'

Convinced by now that the fellow was mad, I struck his hand off my bridle and rode on.

We came out of the forest to find ourselves surrounded by dark hills that rose sharply from the ground in jagged and hideous

shapes. Their slopes were bare and uncultivated and many of their summits were crowned with frowning rocks. As I rode through this desolate and miserable country, a deep depression settled on me. I had for some time been feeling the regrets that most young men experience when the time comes for them to arrange their affairs and decide on marriage.

I was not yet sufficiently advanced in age or experience to consider youth and innocence the most attractive qualities in woman. But these would probably be the only charms in the raw country girl I was to marry, besides good health and perhaps rustic beauty.

I had heard much of the unutterable tedium of the lives of the smaller nobility on their country estates, a tedium only to be surpassed by the monotony of the religious life, which poverty enforces so large a proportion of our daughters and younger sons to enter.

Incongruously enough, I wondered at the same moment whether the eldest sister had red hands, and could have wept when it occurred to me that they might be no monopoly but general to all.

I thought with longing of my life and friends in London, of supper parties I had given on the stage, graced by the incomparable Mrs. Barry, the admirable Mrs. Bracegirdle, of the company at White's coffee-house where the conversation was often as good as in Mr. Congreve's comedies, of discussions on politics, philosophy, science, between men of wit and reason. But the melancholy that had now fastened on me was deeper than mere regret, and I could neither account for it nor shake it off.

We had to ask the way to Riennes more than once, and it struck me that the people who directed us showed more than the usual astonishment and awe natural to the peasant in an uncivilized country when suddenly confronted by a noble stranger and his retinue. In fact they seemed to show definite fear amounting sometimes even to terror, so that I was inclined to think that the old Comte must be a harsh and cruel lord to his people.

Towards evening we entered a gorge where our path went uphill between precipitous slopes and vast overhanging crags of dark rock. They were huger and more horrid than anything I could have imagined, and in the stormy twilight (for the clouds hung low and completely covered the taller hills) they presented an aspect that would have been terrifying to a weak and apprehensive imagination. We seemed no bigger than flies as our horses crawled up the steep ascent. A beetling crag overhung

our path, and as I turned the sharp corner that it made, my mare suddenly reared and backed so violently that I was nearly thrown.

I urged her on with all my force and as I did so I glanced up and saw that what must have frightened her was the figure of a girl standing on the slope of the hill some way above us. She stood so still that at first glance she would have been indistinguishable from the rocks that surrounded her, had it not been for her long pale hair that the wind was blowing straight forward round her face. She wore a wreath of pale lilac and blue flowers, and I could just seize a glimpse of eyes that seemed the same colour as the flowers, set in a white face, before her hair blew past and hid it completely.

That glance was all I could give, for my mare was rearing and plunging in a manner utterly foreign to her usual behaviour. Suddenly, however, she stood quite still, trembling and bathed in sweat. I seized the opportunity to look up again, but the figure had gone. So still had she been while there, and so suddenly had she disappeared, that for an instant I doubted my senses and wondered if my eyes had played me some trick in that dim confusion of lights and shadows. But my impression of her had been too vivid for this doubt to last; I could even recollect the dark dress she wore, plainly cut like a peasant's. Yet I could not think of her as peasant, nor as a person of quality. She seemed some apparition from another world, and though I laughed at myself for my romantic fancy, I defy the most reasonable philosopher not to have shared it if he had seen her as I did. My mare certainly appeared to hold my opinion and with the greater conviction of terror, for she sidled most ridiculously past the place where the girl had stood, and was sweating and shivering as I rode her on. And what struck me as still more peculiar, all my men had some difficulty in getting their horses to pass that spot.

Half an hour later we were free of that hideous gorge, and could see the towers of the Château de Riennes pointing upwards above the fir trees on the hill before us. Relief at reaching the end of my journey fought with an apprehension I could not understand. I remember an attempt at reassurance by telling myself, "If my wife plagues me, I can leave her on my estates in St. Aignan, and spend my time in London and Paris." But even this reflection failed to encourage me.

We clattered into the courtyard to be met with acclamations from grooms and the lackeys who hurried forward to take our horses. The Comte himself came out to the steps of the château and stood awaiting me. He embraced me warmly and led me into

the lighted hall with many expressions of welcome and friendship. He looked a much older man than I had expected in a contemporary of my father's, and his mild blue eyes certainly gave me no impression of the sternness I had anticipated from the timid behaviour of the peasantry.

Indeed there was a certain timidity in his own bearing, a weakness and vacillation in all his movements, as though he lived in continual and fearful expectation. But this did not in any way detract from the courtesy and cordiality of his reception of me and I might not have remarked it had I not been prepared for such a different bearing.

He led me to my room to remove the stains of travel and arrange my dress before being presented to the ladies of his family. Though early in the autumn the weather was cold, and a bright fire of pine logs blazed in my chimney. It was a relief to be sitting in a decent room once more, to have my riding-boots pulled off at last, and to put on a peruke that had been freshly curled and scented.

My valet was a useful fellow and soon effected a satisfactory change in my appearance. I put on a suit of maroon-coloured velvet with embroidered satin waistcoat which I flattered myself set off my figure to advantage, and as I arranged my Mechlin ruffles before a very fine mirror, my gloomy apprehensions lifted, and it was with quite a pleasurable excitement that I looked forward to making the choice of my bride. I laughed at myself for my certainty that one or all would have ugly hands, and reflected that I should probably find a very good, pretty sort of girl and one that in this lonely place was not likely to be entirely unsusceptible.

Madame la Comtesse awaited me in a vast salon of a style that would have been old fashioned in the time of our grandfathers. The huge carved chair in which she sat, raised on a dais in semi-royal fashion at the end of the room, only served to make her appear the more insignificant. Her grey head was bowed, her long knotted fingers hung limply over the arms of her chair. But when she rose to greet me it was with the regal dignity that I remember my mother had told me quite old ladies had had in the days of her youth, a dignity that passed out of fashion with the late Queen Regent*, and is never seen now.

I was shocked, however, at the vacant yet troubled expression in her dim grey eyes. She certainly did not look as old as the Comte, nor could she, I knew from what my father had told me, be far past the period of middle life. Yet her mind seemed feeble and wandering as in extreme age.

* Anne of Austria, mother of Louis XIV and Regent of France during his minority.

She made me sit on a stool beside her chair and strove to entertain me with a courtesy that could still charm, though I could perceive very plainly the effort that it cost her. Every now and then she would stoop to caress a great white cat that rubbed against her chair and make some remark to it or to me concerning it.

I did my best to make friends with the favourite, but I do not like cats, and this beast regarded me with a distant and supercilious air, impervious to all my advances though it never took its pale green eyes off my face. This persistent stare irritated me till I longed to kick it out of the room, and foolishly this irritation somehow prevented me accommodating myself as well as I might have done to my hostess's tentative and desultory conversation.

It was a relief as well as an excitement when Mademoiselle de Riennes and Mademoiselle Marie de Riennes were announced. A tall girl entered the room with her arm around a light childish figure whose face was almost hidden against her sister's sleeve. The elder received my salutations with a certain amount of grace and finish, the younger with such confusion of shyness that in kindness I withdrew my eyes from her as soon as possible.

I was too anxious to see the elder to be able to see very clearly at first, but I perceived that she was neither ugly nor foolish and the hand I was permitted to kiss was of a good shape and colour. Later as we talked I saw that there were certain points in her face and figure that might be called beautiful. Her olive complexion lacked colour, but that could be easily remedied. She had large dark eyes of a very fine shape a well-formed bust and shoulders, a pretty mouth with good teeth, an excellent forehead and charming little ears. Yet the whole did not somehow make for beauty. It was incomplete or perhaps marred in some way.

It is difficult to perceive the habitual expression of a young girl who is anxious to please, but I thought that the quick interest and smiles with which she attended to my conversation with her mother were not natural to her, and that from time to time a look of sullen and even fierce brooding would settle on her face, though momentarily, for the next instant she would rouse herself and seem to push it away.

Whenever I could do so without increasing her confusion, I stole a look at the younger daughter. She undoubtedly, was possessed of beauty, of a fair, almost infantile order; her lips were full and red and remained always just parted, her face was an exquisitely rounded oval, and her light-brown hair curled naturally on the nape of her neck in tendrils as soft and shining as those of a very young child. But she was extremely unformed, and I could not but feel that in spite of my vague disappointment in

the elder, it was she who was in most respects the more suitable for my purpose.

After allowing sufficient time for her to compose herself, I addressed some simple remark to Mademoiselle Marie that should have been perfectly easy to answer. She looked at me with an uncertain, almost an uncomprehending expression in her blue eyes that reminded me of her mother's, and stammered a few words unintelligibly. Her extreme timidity was perhaps natural to her youth and upbringing, but I thought I detected a vacancy and weakness of mind in her manner of showing it.

'Decidedly,' I told myself, 'this one is best fitted for the convent, and after answering my remark myself as though I had but intended to continue it, I addressed myself again to the eldest. She replied very suitably and prettily and I thought her manners would not be amiss in any salon in London or Paris.

We continued happily therefore in a conversation which if not exactly amusing was at least satisfactory and promising, when an absurdly small incident occurred that proved oddly disconcerting to Mademoiselle.

The cat, which had so far continued to reserve its obnoxious gaze for me, suddenly walked across to her stool, looking up in her face and mewling. She shrank back with an involuntary shudder. It was not this that startled me, for I knew many people have an unconquerable aversion to cats and I have seen the great and manly Duc de Noailles turn faint at the Council Board because the little King* carried in a kitten. But what surprised me in Mademoiselle de Riennes was the same backward, fearful glance that I had seen in her father, as though she dreaded, not the cat itself, but some unseen horror behind her. The next moment, however, she was replying naturally and with no more than a becoming hesitation to some remark I had addressed to her.

I wondered why the third daughter had not appeared, and the same wonder seemed to be disturbing my hostesses for they looked continually towards the door. Madame la Comtesse remarked two or three times, 'My daughter is late'; it was odd that she should so speak of her youngest daughter instead of reserving the expression for Mademoiselle de Riennes. She started violently when the footman announced, 'Mademoiselle Claude de Riennes,' and the eldest daughter leaned suddenly forward as though she would speak to me. She did not, but she fixed on me a look of such agonized entreaty that it arrested me as I rose, so that I did not turn on the instant, as I should have done, to greet Mademoiselle Claude.

* Louis XV.

When I did, I had to wait a full minute or two before I could recover sufficient composure to address her as I ought. Mademoiselle Claude was the girl I had seen on the rocky hillside. Her smooth and shining hair was dressed high in the prevailing fashion, her hooped dress of pearl-coloured satin was suitable to her rank, yet I was certain that she was the same as that wild figure I had seen, with hair blown straight before her face.

What further startled me was that I found that until that moment I had not really believed the apparition on the hillside to be a human creature. It was a disturbing discovery for a man of sense, living in an age of science and reason, to make in himself. I had certainly never before been guilty of imagining that I had seen a spirit.

I could only conclude that the peculiar gliding grace with which she advanced and curtsied to me did indeed connect her with the nymphs of mountain and grove in classic lore, and considered how I should turn a compliment to her on the subject without exposing to her family how I had met her in this strange fashion.

To my astonishment, however, she said in answer to her mother's introduction, 'I have already seen Monsieur de St. Aignan,' but no surprise was shown by mother or sisters. Mademoiselle Claude's voice was low and very soft, it had a quality in it that I have not met in any other voice and that I do not know how to describe; I should perhaps do so best if I said that it seemed to purr.

She sat beside her mother and did not speak again; her eyes were downcast and her long pale lashes, only less pale than her skin, languished on her cheek; her face was small and round, ending in a sharply pointed little chin. She wore in her bosom a bunch of the same light lilac and blue flowers that had been in her hair when I had first seen her, and the peculiarity of wearing such a simple posy when in full dress, caught my attention.

I asked their names, hoping to hear her speak again, but she only smiled, and it was the eldest daughter who told me that they were wild flowers, harebells and autumn crocuses, and that the latter with their long white stems and faintly purple heads were called Naked Ladies by the shepherd folk. Mademoiselle Claude raised her head as her sister spoke and handed me one to see. Her eyes looked full into mine for an instant and again I could not be certain if their pale colour were more like the blue or the lilac flowers, and again the compliment that rose to my lips evaded me before I could speak it.

The cat had deserted the chair of Madame la Comtesse and was rubbing backwards and forwards against Mademoiselle Claude, at last taking its eyes off my face and staring up at its young mistress. It was evident that she had no share of her sister's aversion to cats. Suddenly it leapt up on to her shoulder and rubbed its head against her long slim throat. Madame de Riennes stroked her daughter's head and that of the cat. 'They are both so white, so white,' she murmured, and then, speaking I suppose to me, though she did not appear to be addressing anyone, she said, 'The moon shone on my daughter when she was born.'

I was embarrassed how to reply, for these disconnected remarks seemed to indicate premature senility more clearly than anything she had yet said. Fortunately at this moment the Comte entered and we went to supper.

I sat of course between my hostess and Mademoiselle de Riennes whom I wished to engage again in conversation. But her former ease seemed to have departed, she answered me with embarrassment and sometimes with positive stupidity. She now avoided meeting my eyes and looked repeatedly across the table to where her sisters sat opposite. I could not be sure which of the two she was looking at, for both sat silent with their eyes down-cast.

The rest of the evening was spent in the salon, where Madame la Comtesse requested her daughters to show me some of the results of the labours that filled their days. Mademoiselle de Riennes led me to a tapestry frame that struck me as the most perfect exhibition of tedium that could be devised. Mademoiselle Marie showed me a Book of Hours that she was illuminating; my admiration was reserved for the fair fingers that pointed out their work. If the hands of Mademoiselle de Riennes were good, the hands of Mademoiselle Marie were delicious, not so fine in shape, but softly rounded, helpless and dimpled like a baby's. I began to wonder if I might not have judged hastily of her parts. Though the second in age, she appeared the youngest of the three; she was evidently slow in development, and who could tell but that after marriage had placed her in a suitable position, she might become the most brilliant as well as the most beautiful of all?

Politeness obliged me to turn at last to Mademoiselle Claude who was sitting as still as ever, with hands folded in her lap, and ask what she had to show me.

'Nothing, Monsieur,' said she, smiling, but without looking up.

'Mademoiselle is so idle?' I asked, hoping to tease her into a glance. But I did not win it, and at that moment Madame de Riennes suggested we should dance. It proved impossible as the

daughters did not know the modern fashion of dancing and I knew no other. Madame de Riennes sat at the harpsichord and played an old-fashioned air to which her two elder daughters danced a *pas de deux*. I was surprised to see that again Mademoiselle Claude did not perform, and asked her if she did not like dancing.

'Oh, yes, Monsieur,' she replied, in that soft purring voice of hers, 'I like it very well.'

'Then do you not care to dance with two or three?'

'Monsieur is right, I prefer to dance with many.'

'Then, Mademoiselle, you can have but few opportunities for dancing here where I should imagine balls are a rarity. Do you not find it very dull?'

'No, Monsieur, I do not find it dull.'

All the time she seemed to be smiling, though as I was standing above her and her face remained lowered, I could not well see. The hands that lay so still in her lap were like the long white stems of the flowers she wore with the ridiculous name—they were so slim and bloodless. As I looked at them I felt an unaccountable wish to draw away from them. I could in no way explain it; I have felt repulsion to hands before now, but to none that were beautiful. But I decided quickly that it was only an absurd fancy that likened them in my mind to hands of the dead, and so still and white they were that this was not surprising.

When the dance was finished, Madame de Riennes rose from the harpsichord and patted Mademoiselle Claude's cheek.

'My daughter can sing and play,' she said. 'She sits so still, too still, but she can sing very well.'

Mademoiselle Claude fetched her lute. As she sat with the instrument on her knee, her limp fingers plucking idly at the strings, I thought to myself, 'She is the last I would choose to be the mother of my heirs.' There seemed nothing alive about her, from her dead hair, so nearly white, to her pale and smiling lips. In the corner of the wainscot where she sat, her pearl-coloured skirts spread round her and reflected on the polished floor, she had the appearance of a moonlit cloud, possessing no doubt a certain strange beauty but more as a picture than a woman.

She began to sing; I did not think a great deal of her voice, having heard better, but it had a certain charm, being low, caressing and of a peculiar timbre. She sang an air from an opera now out of date, and then a song in which the tune was unlike any other I had ever heard. It was very simple and had a certain gaiety, it seemed to follow no known rules of method and harmony. There were two or three notes that recurred again and

again like a call, and the melody between moved backwards and forwards as in the movement of a dance.

It seemed older than any other music, I cannot say why, unless it was that as I listened, my imagination conjured up visions of sacrificial dances performed in the most ancient times of Greece or Egypt. While in England, I had stayed at a country house whose owner had had the humour to take an interest in the old songs and ballads of his countryside and even to profess to admire them. He had played some of them to me one evening when he had tired of the cards, and I could not but admit that there was something in their rude simplicity that pleased the ear.

They were for the most part wild and plaintive, frequently unutterably dismal. But old as they had sounded, this tune that Mademoiselle Claude was singing seemed infinitely older. There was nothing plaintive in its wildness. It belonged to an age when men had not yet learned to regret, to distinguish between good and evil, to encumber themselves with the million hindrances and restrictions that separate men from beasts.

A strange restlessness and discontent seized on me. I felt a ridiculous but none the less powerful loathing of my condition, of the condition of all men in this dull world, of the morals and customs that force our lives into a monotonous pattern from the cradle to the grave, of the very clothes I wore, stiff and cumbrous, crowned with a heavy peruke of false hair. I longed to fling them all off and shake myself free, and with them every convention that bound me to decency of conduct. In committing these words to paper, I am aware that I am describing the sensations of a lunatic and a savage rather than any that should be possible to a man of birth, sense and cultivation, living in a highly civilized and enlightened age. But if I am to be truthful in these memoirs I must admit that at the moment I failed completely to observe how shamefully, and, what perhaps is worse, how absurdly inappropriate my sentiments were to a gentleman and a courtier.

I raised my eyes to find those of Mademoiselle Claude fixed upon my face. She was still singing, but I could not distinguish the words nor even recognize to which language they belonged. Her gaze did not startle me for I seemed to know that it had been resting on me for some time. I saw that her eyes, in this light at any rate, were neither blue nor lilac as I had thought, but pale green like those of the white cat that stood, arched and purring, on the arm of her chair; and, like the cat's, the pupils were perpendicular.

Heedless of manners, I looked hard to assure myself of the fact; and her eyes which had been so bashfully abased all the evening

did not flicker nor turn away under my stare but continued to gaze into mine until I became conscious of nothing but their pale and luminous depths. They seemed to grow and to diminish, to come near and to recede very far away, and all the time the tune she sang moved up and down as in the measure of a dance, and the words she sang remained unintelligible yet gradually appeared to be familiar.

Suddenly the song ceased, and I started involuntarily and shook myself as though I had been rudely awakened from an oppressive dream. I looked around me, hardly able to believe that my surroundings had remained the same from the time when Mademoiselle Claude had begun to sing. Mademoiselle Marie, seated on a low stool next to her elder sister, was leaning so close against her that her face was completely hidden and her whole body was as stiff and motionless in its crouched position as if it had been paralyzed.

Mademoiselle de Riennes sat as still as she, but her eyes now raised themselves to mine slowly and with difficulty and I caught a glimpse of the same expression of agonized entreaty that had arrested me when I first rose to greet her youngest sister. It was only a glimpse, for the next instant they fell again as though not bearing to look longer into mine. In some way that I must fail to express, she appeared smaller and more insignificant. I wondered that I had ever thought of her as possessing good looks and distinction of manners.

Madame de Riennes had fallen into a doze and it may have been this that gave her, too, a slightly shrunken appearance. Certainly it struck me that she was much older and feebler than I had comprehended. I do not remember how I took my leave of them for the night, I only remember Madame la Comtesse murmuring weakly as she wished me good rest, 'She is so white, my daughter—too white, too white.'

The comfort of a good bed again after so long and uncomfortable a journey was by far my most important reflection on reaching my room, and as my valet prepared me for that blessed condition, the experiences and fancies of the past evening resolved themselves into the opinion that my imagination had been highly strung by the fatigues of the journey and the strangeness of new surroundings, and that in reality the family of the de Riennes were a very good, kindly, though old-fashioned sort of people, and that I had three pretty girls to choose from, though it was still a little difficult to know which to choose.

'Mademoiselle Marie is the prettiest,' I told myself on climbing

into bed. 'But Mademoiselle de Riennes has the most sense,' I added, as Jacques drew the curtains round me, 'and Mademoiselle Claude'—I began as I laid my head on the pillows, but I found that I had not known what I thought of Mademoiselle Claude and was just dropping off to sleep without troubling to consider the question when I remembered that I had noticed something very strange about her eyes when she was singing.

For a moment I could not recall what it was, then suddenly it occurred to me, and with a sensation of horror that I had not felt at all at the time I had observed it, that the pupils of the eyes instead of being round were long and pointed.

I was exceedingly sleepy when I thought of this, but I woke myself by repeating several times as though it were of urgent importance that I should remember it—'The eyes are not human. Remember, the eyes are not human.'

I repeated it until I forgot what it was that had struck my observation, yet it seemed an imperative necessity that I should remember what it was that had filled my whole being with that sense of utmost horror. In my efforts to do so I fell sound asleep.

Nothing is more irritating than to be wakened out of a deep and dreamless slumber by some small, persistent noise. The noise I heard in my sleep kept awakening me again and again until at last, tired of perpetually dropping off and being aroused, I sat up in bed and listened. I heard something rustling outside my door, a soft running tread every now and then up and down the passage, and then, what I knew had awakened me so many times, something scratching at the door itself. I decided I must go and see what it was but felt the most absurd and shameful reluctance to do so.

I put out my hand through the curtains to reach for my bedgown on the chair beside me. Instead of the accustomed touch of velvet and fur that I expected, my hand seemed to be grasping a long cold finger. I recoiled in violent agitation, and as I snatched my hand away and covered it with my other as though to assure myself of a human touch, I thought I felt the finger drawn slowly across my forehead.

I shuddered from it, and yet my horror was mingled with an inexplicable pleasure. Trembling with excitement rather than with fear, I now drew aside the bed curtains, leapt out and opened the shutters.

The moon was nearly at the full, and by its brilliant light I could see, laid on my bedgown, the white and slender stalk of the wild autumn crocus that Mademoiselle Claude had presented to me. It surprised me, for I had no recollection of laying it there and indeed thought I had dropped it into the fire. In any case

there was a satisfactory explanation of the cause of my ridiculous terrors, and the touch on my forehead must have been an imaginary result of them. It was odd, though, that as I took up the flower, the sensation of it seemed completely different from the thing that I had first grasped, and I marvelled that I could ever have mistaken it for a human finger.

All was so silent now that I got back into bed, first laying my sword on the chair beside me, and was just falling asleep when again I heard the rustle outside, and a soft stroking rather than scratching against my door. I stretched out my hand for the sword and found that it was shaking. This evidence of my womanish apprehension was so unaccountable and utterly confounding that I began to wonder if I were not already paying the price, though certainly an over-heavy one, of the pleasures naturally pertaining to a gallant man.

I resolved that now I was about to marry, I would make a different disposition of my life, abandon such pleasures, and settle on my country estates at St. Aignan. At this moment I heard that same furtive noise again on the door, and the idea that my plans for reforming were the result of the scratchings of a cat caused me to burst into a roar of laughter which wholesomely restored me to my natural self.

I snatched up my sword and ran to the door. I could see nothing but darkness, but I heard a faint 'miaow' somewhere down the passage and went quickly and cautiously towards it, calling 'Puss, Puss, Puss,' laughing to myself at the thought of the murder I was contemplating on the favourite of two of my hostesses, and already planning the apology I should have to make. The door into my moonlit room had swung to after me and I had to feel my way in the blackness. Suddenly I felt claws round my leg and knew that the cat must have rushed at me from behind. I struck quickly down with my sword and thought I hit something soft and springing but could not be quite sure. There was no savage 'miaow' in response to show I had hurt the brute.

I went back to my room and on examining my sword in the moonlight, found that there was a small streak of blood on it. I thought with satisfaction that that would probably keep the beast away from my door, and settled myself for sleep. I was wrong, for all night I was disturbed by subdued sounds of scampering and scuffling in the passage, and more than once I thought that I felt the lightest pressure of a cold finger on my eyelids.

When Jacques brought me my chocolate in the morning, he found me more worn out and irritable than after a night of debauch. He exclaimed when he saw my sword on which the

blood had dried, and I told him to clean it, saying that the cat had been disturbing my rest and that I had struck at it. My head throbbed and ached so uncomfortably that I decided I would refresh myself with a good ride before meeting any of my host's family, and ordered my mare to be saddled at once.

As I went down into the courtyard, I saw the white cat sleeping in a sunny corner of the steps. I turned the animal over with my boot, and it stretched out its paws and clawed playfully at the air. I could discover no sign of any wound anywhere upon it. I asked the groom what other cats they had, and he replied that this was the only one in the château. I got into the saddle, too much mystified to care to think, and rode as hard as I could.

The morning was fresh and pleasant, and the country looked excellent for boar-hunting. I was wondering what entertainment in that way my host meant to show me after my long abstinence (sport in England being of the tamest) when my attention was struck by a huge stone a little way off. I was riding across a fairly smooth slope of moorland with hills on my right that rose in abrupt and monstrous shapes as though thrown up by some violent cataclysm of the earth, while on my left stretched a vast plain as far as I could see. The whole was desolate because uncultivated, but in the morning sunshine the hideous aspect of the country did not oppress one as in the gloomy twilight in which I had first seen it. The stone I had noticed was conspicuous for its size and solitariness, for there were no rocks near.

I was riding up to it when suddenly my mare behaved in exactly the same manner as the evening before, shying violently and then rearing and plunging. I succeeded at last in quieting her sufficiently to keep still, but it was beyond my power to make her advance another step. I had always treated her with the consideration due to a lady of high breeding and mettlesome spirit, but on this occasion I must admit her whims drove me to a pretty considerable use of whip and spur. But all to no effect. She would not advance one step nearer the stone.

I dismounted and was about to see whether I could drag her thither by the bridle, when I noticed footprints at my feet, just in front of my mare's forefeet that were so obstinately planted on the ground. There was nothing odd in finding footprints on the moor, but what was odd was that they did not advance straight in any direction but curved sharply round. I followed them a little way and saw that the marks were exceeding confused, as though many pairs of feet had trodden close upon each other in the same spot. The grass, in fact, was all kicked up, and when I had followed this rough curve a little distance I saw that it was part of

the outline of a vast circle in which the stone was, more or less accurately, the centre point.

I had no sooner made this perplexing discovery than I observed a respectable-looking man in black approaching me, whom I presently perceived to be a priest. He greeted me in an abrupt and not over-respectful fashion, asking if I were not afraid to go so near the fairy ring. Few people, he said, would care to adventure themselves so close to it even in broad sunlight. I observed, smiling, that the fairies in this part of the world must be remarkably substantial to have kicked up the ground so vigorously, and asked if he could not give me some more reasonable explanation of the footprints. He looked at me with a suspicious kind of sullen stupidity that made me conclude he was probably very little above the level of a peasant himself.

I left him to walk over to the stone, which I examined with some interest. The ground had been much disturbed close under it, and the stone itself, which was at the top like a table, was covered with dark stains. It occurred to me that here was a possible explanation of my mare's refusal to approach any nearer. Horses are notoriously sensitive to the smell of blood, and I was certain that the stains I was looking at were those of dried blood. I went back to the priest and asked him what the stone was used for.

'It is never used, Monsieur,' he cried, 'no one in the country would go near it.'

'Then,' said I, 'what are those dark stains on it?'

His little dark eyes looked at me anxiously and shiftily as though he disliked the subject.

'A holy man and a son of the Church, Monsieur, can know nothing of such things. Some say that this stone is haunted by devils and that they or the fairies, who resemble them dance in a ring round it.' He crossed himself and continued, 'I say that it is better not to speak of these things but to pray against temptation and the wiles of the Devil and to implore the help and protection of Holy Church.' He added that he was the *cure* of Riennes and chaplain to the convent near by, and invited me to look at his church which was not far off. I found myself walking with him, more out of inattention than politeness, my horse's bridle on my arm.

There was nothing to interest me in his church, a wretched chapel built at the rude Gothic period and even more chilly and uncomfortable than such buildings usually are.

I gave him something for his church, and mounting my mare, I rode back to the château.

I met one of the grooms at the gate, and throwing my bridle to him, walked through the gardens. As I had hoped, I saw the curve of a hooped petticoat on one of the seats, and hurrying towards it found Mademoiselle de Riennes and Mademoiselle Marie seated together, the younger reading her breviary aloud. Her hair caught reflections of gold in the sunlight in a way that enchanted me, and I lost no time in informing her of the fact in terms sufficiently metaphorical to be correct.

My compliments were received with a foolish stare, not even a blush to show they were comprehended. If a woman cannot take a compliment, she is lost. I turned to her sister to be met with better success, while the younger's attention returned to her breviary. Mademoiselle de Riennes tried to distract her from it, fearing, I think, that I might be offended.

'No, no,' replied the fair *dévôte*, in an anxious and pleading manner, 'I promised Mother Abbess in Lianon I would always read first. But I will not disturb you by it—I can read elsewhere.'

She was about to rise but I sprang up from the grass where I had been setting at their feet and detained her.

'Do not, I beg of you, Mademoiselle,' said I, 'deprive me of an example as charming as it is edifying. I can never hope to see again such usually opposed qualities in such perfect conjunction.'

Then remembering that I was wasting my breath, I asked her as one would ask a child if she were very fond of the Mother Abbess she mentioned. She did not pay full attention to my question at first and I noticed a habit she continually had of brushing her hand across her eyes and then staring, as though she were not certain of what she saw. Then she answered, 'Oh, yes, very fond. One is safe with her.'

I glanced at Mademoiselle de Riennes to find how she took this odd remark, but was surprised that she seemed to have received it with an unreasonable amount of perturbation. She rallied herself quickly however, and said to me, 'My sister has always wished to enter the convent at Lianon, which is an order stricter than the convent here at Riennes. She has the vocation.'

I wondered whether Mademoiselle were entirely disinterested, in giving me this information, and I asked her what were her own feelings with regard to the conventual life. She replied in an even tone without a trace of that desire to please that had shown hitherto in all her remarks, 'That it is a useful necessity. That as it is no longer considered humane to expose newly-born daughters to the wolves on the hillside, their parents must be able to place them later in convents where they may die slowly, not from rigours and mortifications but from tedium, the tedium that makes

all day and all night seem one perpetual and melancholy afternoon.'

Her eyes glittered with so strange an expression of hatred and even rage, that she, whom I had hitherto considered as the most reasonable of the family, now appeared almost wild. I wondered why her parents had not given her the right of priority which belonged to her, instead of leaving the choice to me.

My father's remarks on the subject came back to me, and I now considered that I had certainly better choose Mademoiselle de Riennes and satisfy the strictest claims of honour and delicacy. This decision was the easier to reach since Mademoiselle Marie had again shown so plainly she was a fool. I rose and took my leave of them that I might go and find the Comte to tell him my decision, for I feared that to wait too long before arriving at it might look like discourtesy.

I walked down an alley between clipped box hedges that rose above my head, and as I turned a corner I saw Mademoiselle Claude walking in my direction. She was correctly attired in a grey lute-string nightgown with ruffles of fine embroidery, her hands were folded in front of her and her head, slightly bent, was neatly dressed. When I had greeted her I asked if she had been walking long in the garden.

'No, Monsieur,' she replied, 'I have been to the convent. The chaplain informed me of your pious interest in his church.'

I disliked the thought that the priest I had met was chaplain to the Convent of Riennes—still more, that he had been talking with Mademoiselle Claude. I asked her which of her sister's opinions she shared concerning the religious life—did she not agree with Mademoiselle de Riennes that it was inexpressibly tedious? She smiled very slightly.

'I should not find life in the convent tedious, Monsieur,' she said.

'Then you, like Mademoiselle Marie, have the vocation?'

'I have a vocation.'

As she spoke, she at last raised her eyes and looked up at me, nor did they flicker nor turn away as I looked down into them. It came upon me with a shock, that was not all displeasure, that the eyes of this young girl revealed a deeper knowledge of evil, which is what we generally mean by knowledge of life, than was sounded in all my experience as a travelled man of fashion. And as this struck me, I laughed, in a way that should have frightened her, but only brought her nearer to my side with a low, purring murmur, too soft for a laugh, her eyes still fixed on mine.

An extraordinary sensation swam over me. I was trying to remember something that I had seen in or thought about her eyes the evening before. The effort to remember was so strong that it was like a physical struggle, and though I felt I might succeed if I drew my eyes away from hers for a moment, I could not do this.

Then I noticed that she was humming the tune of the song that she had sung the night before, and as she did so her body rocked a little, backwards and forwards, as though swaying to the measure of a dance, while her eyes never left mine. I advanced a step towards her, she receded, we seemed to be dancing together, though with what steps and movement I could not say. Presently she was speaking to me, chanting the words of the tune—'Monsieur enjoys dancing? Monsieur will dance with me?'

I seized her by the shoulders. She winced and cried out, her lips contorted with pain that my movement, rough as it was, could not have caused by itself. As she tried to pull herself away, her dress slipped over her shoulder and revealed a freshly made scar on the white skin, caused by a knife or some other weapon. I cried out on seeing it and let go of her, but she pulled her dress over it again in an instant, looking back over her shoulder at me and smiling.

'So Monsieur will dance with me,' she said, and moved away from me down the alley so quickly that she seemed to have gone before I had perceived her go.

I was now utterly unwilling to continue my way to the château, to tell the Comte I desired to marry his eldest daughter. I roamed up and down the box alleys for a considerable length of time, ill at ease and dissatisfied. The rest of the day passed in an intolerable mingling of tedium and excitement. I seemed to be waiting for it to pass in eager expectancy of I knew not what. I found myself watching the sun as though I were longing for it to set; again and again I glanced at the clock and told myself, 'The moon will be at the full tonight,' though I did not know what possible interest that could have for me.

I supposed it was some echo of Madame la Comtesse's maundering fancies when she had rambled to me about her youngest daughter, and I tried to pull myself up sharply and point out that I was myself becoming like an old woman, my mind incapable of decision or reasoning, of anything but a feeble repetition of words and phrases that came from I knew not where.

Yet I could not shake off this mood nor discover what I meant to do regarding my marriage; nor indeed what I was thinking of. I found conversation, even with Mademoiselle de Riennes, unbearably wearisome; it was no pleasure to observe Mademoiselle

Marie's beauty which now appeared as insipid and lifeless as a puppet's. I saw Mademoiselle Claude again only in the presence of her parents, but she never spoke nor did she look at me.

In the evening I chanced to be alone with the Comte. I felt that he was expecting me to speak of my marriage, and suddenly I knew that it was only his youngest daughter I had any desire to marry—a desire so burning and importunate that I marvelled I had not realized my wishes sooner. I spoke of them, saying that though I was anxious to perform the part of a man of scrupulous honour, I could not but take advantage of his liberality and make my choice according to the dictates of my heart.

He showed no surprise, and gave his consent in terms appropriate and correct, with nothing that I could interpret as expressive of displeasure. Yet he spoke mechanically and with a strained, uneasy attention, almost, or so it sometimes appeared, as if he were listening and repeating someone else's words, instead of directly answering me. It struck me when he had finished speaking, that he was a smaller and a duller man than I had formerly observed him to be.

I found a pretext for going early to my room, where I paced up and down in a fever of restlessness. In spite of the exaltation of my new desires and the immediate prospect of their fruition, I felt that I had never been so much bored in the course of my whole existence as at that moment; that never before had I discovered how ineffably tedious and wearisome that whole existence had been.

I remembered the various pleasures I had experienced and marvelled that I had ever found zest in them; my deepest passions, my most exciting adventures, now appeared as flat, trivial and insipid as the emotions and escapades of a schoolboy. I wondered with a kind of despair if there were nothing left in life that could amuse me. The fact that my marriage was to be one of inclination should no doubt have answered this question, but I seemed already satiated with that as with all else.

I would have bartered all that was most dear to me, my possessions, my name, my life, my honour, my soul itself, for any new experience that could satisfy this new curiosity and raise me from my intolerable tedium. Desires arose in me so monstrous and unnatural that my thoughts could scarcely find shape or name for them, yet I regarded them calmly, without horror, without even surprise.

At last I went to bed, because however much I longed to be occupied there was no other occupation for me. In spite of the

disordered turmoil in my brain, I fell asleep quickly. No noises disturbed me this time, I did not dream, but I woke as suddenly as I had fallen asleep. I drew back my bed-curtains and saw that the room was full of moonlight, for the window shutters which Jacques had closed before he left me for the night were now wide open, and I could hear a great noise of wind in the pine trees outside. In the middle of the floor stood the white cat, perfectly still, its back arched and tail erect, its pale green eyes glaring at me. It now leaped on to the foot of the bed and began ramping its paws up and down on the quilt in a state of violent excitement, uttering short wild mewling cries.

I kicked it off, but it sprang on to another part of the bed and clawed at the bed-clothes as though trying to pull them off. A cloud must have passed over the moon for the room was momentarily darkened, and a blast of wind came roaring through the pines and rushed in through my open shutters, blowing the bed-curtains all over me. In that instant I could have sworn that I felt the light cold touch of a hand on my heart.

I scrambled out of bed and hurried on my clothes as though my life depended on getting dressed instantly. Clapping on my sword-belt I strode to the door and found the cat there awaiting me. It was purring loudly, and looking back to me if I was following, it trotted into the passage. I could just see a vague shape of something white as it passed before me through the darkness and I followed downstairs and along passages until I came plump against a closed door. I fumbled for bolts and locks and unfastened them, hearing always the purring of the cat close by me. It never occurred to me to wonder why I was following this beast I detested, out of doors in the middle of the night.

As soon as the door was open I hurried out as fast as I could, through the gardens and out on to the countryside. I was not following the cat now, nor did I see it anywhere. I did not know where I was going, but presently I perceived that I was on the same broad slope of moorland where I had ridden that morning. There were sharp risings and fallings in the ground that I had avoided in my ride, and that prevented my seeing far in front; also, though the moon when unclouded shone clear in the sky, a low-lying miasmic fog obscured the ground.

As I rose to the summit of one of these mounds, I stopped and listened. I thought that I had heard music, but as the wind rushed onwards through the pine woods behind me, I could no longer distinguish it. At this moment the whole light of the full moon shone out from behind a hurrying cloud, and I saw vaguely before me in the mist a vast circle of apparently human figures,

revolving in furious movement round some huge and dark object of fantastic shape. Clouds of smoke, reddened now and then by fire, rose round this object and were swept onwards in the wind.

I ran towards the circle; as I did so, the music came nearer, now loud, now faint, on the uncertain blast, and I recognized the tune as the same that Mademoiselle Claude had sung to me. I approached cautiously as I drew near. Sometimes the ring of dancers swung so near me that I was within a few feet of them, sometimes it receded far away. All the figures were holding hands and faced outwards, their backs toward the centre of the circle that they formed.

I saw the figures of men, women and even children flying past me; not one had a human face. The faces of goats, toads, cats, of grinning devils and monkeys, showed opposite me for one instant, clear in the moonlight or obscured by the drifting smoke. Those that seemed most horrible of all were white faces that had no features.

Suddenly the ring broke for one instant as it swung within a yard of where I crouched, and at that moment a blinding cloud of smoke blew into my face. A hand was flung out and touched mine, a light cold touch that I knew. I seized it and sprang to my feet, immediately my other hand was clasped and I was swung madly onwards into the movement of the dance.

I could now no longer see the dancers, not even those on either side of me whose hands I grasped. I saw nothing but the night, the smoke, the flying landscape, now vague and vast as of an illimitable sea of fog, now black and hideous shapes of mountains that rose sharply in the moonlight. I felt an exhilaration such as I had never known, a brusque and furious enjoyment, as though my senses and powers were quickened beyond their natural limit. Yet again and again I found I was trying to remember something, with the urgency and even the agony that besets one in a nightmare; but my mind appeared to have forsaken its office.

Then without any warning the hands in my clasp were torn from me, and the ring broke in all directions. I staggered back unable to keep my balance in the shock of the suddenly loosened contact; the next instant I realized that she who had first taken my hand had gone, and I was hunting madly for her through that monstrous assembly.

Though the ring had broken, the music continued, and I jostled many who were still dancing, back to back, with their hands joined. In the misty confusion it was impossible to distinguish anything clearly; I thought I saw gigantic toads dressed in green velvet who were carrying dishes, but I did not stay to remark

them. Huge clouds of dun-coloured smoke arose before me, lit up momentarily by flames, and in their midst I saw for an instant a shape that seemed greater and more hideous than the human. A mighty voice arose from it, speaking, it seemed, some word of command, and straightaway all the company fell on their knees.

Then I saw her whom I had been seeking. She stood erect on what appeared to be a black throne, the fiery smoke behind her. The moon, darkened of late, shone out on her white limbs that were scarcely concealed by the fluttering rags she wore. Her loosened hair blew straight before her face, and appeared snow-white in the moonlight. Something gleamed in her uplifted hand, she bent, and at this moment an awful cry arose, a sobbing shriek so deformed by its extreme anguish and terror that though it was certainly human I could not distinguish if it were from man, woman or child. The figure rose erect, her arms flung wide as in triumph, her face revealed. It was the face of Mademoiselle Claude.

I rushed towards the throne; it was the huge stone I had observed on my ride. She turned towards me, her face bent down to greet me, her lips parted in laughter, her eyes gleaming as I had never seen them, her whole body transfused with some mysterious force that seemed to fill her with life, pleasure and attraction more than human. My senses reeled as in delirium, I seized her in my arms and dragged her from the stone. In doing so, my hand closed on the knife in hers, and something warm and wet drenched my fingers. The meaning of that hideous death-cry I had just heard suddenly penetrated my numbed and stupefied brain—and I stood stiff with horror, cold sweat breaking out on my hands and forehead.

She twisted herself in my arms till her face looked up into mine; her eyes shone like pale flames and appeared to draw near and then recede very far away, and with them my horror likewise receded until I felt I was forgetting the very cause of it. Yet it seemed to me, as though someone not myself were telling me, that if I did so, the consequences would be worse than death. I struggled desperately to recall what I had felt, and with it something else that all that past day and this night I had been trying to remember. I longed to pray but was ashamed to enlist the aid of a Power that until that moment I had doubted and mocked.

Her arms slid upwards round my neck; my flesh shuddered beneath their embrace as from contact with some loathsome thing, yet she seemed but the more desirable. My consciousness

began to fail me as I bent over her. Again the eyes came close, enormous, and I stared at the pupils, black and perpendicular in their green depths. A voice that I did not at first recognize for my own shrieked aloud—'They are not human. Remember, the eyes are not human.'

As I cried out, I found that I could remove my eyes from hers, I looked down at what I held, and on her naked shoulder saw the scar I had observed that morning. I knew now that it had been made by my own sword the night before when I had struck in the darkness at her familiar, and the discovery turned me sick and faint. I frantically repulsed the accursed white body that clung to mine, and made to draw my sword. The witch screamed not in fear but in laughter, and flung herself upon me with her knife before I could get my sword free from its scabbard. I fended off the blow on my heart, and with my left arm dripping blood I seized her wrist while my right, now holding my sword, was raised to strike.

In that instant I was seized from behind by what seemed to be a hundred slippery hands clawing at my neck, arms and ankles. The whole mob, laughing, sobbing, screaming, chuckling, was round me and upon me. It appeared certain that I should be overcome, but I struck out madly with my sword and succeeded in effecting some clearance round me.

A kind of berserker fury consumed me; I rushed upon that obscene herd, striking right and left to hew a passage through them. They fled shrieking in front of me but closed on me from behind; I was bitten, clawed, scratched, hacked at, cut at, with no proper weapons it seemed, but the blows would have been sufficient to overcome me had not all my forces been so desperately engaged.

After a period that seemed to endure for hours, I found that I was hacking blindly at the empty air; I wiped the blood from my eyes and looking round me saw that I was alone, surrounded only by the mounds and hillocks through which I had approached to that frightful merrymaking. My legs would no longer support me, my senses fled from me, and I fell upon the ground.

I woke to consciousness to see the light of dawn behind the mountains. All was silent; at some distance, a thin column of smoke, as from a dying fire, ascended straight upwards in the still air. I struggled to my feet and with all the strength that was left in my bruised body I dragged myself towards the château.

One of my grooms was in the courtyard as I entered, and cried out on seeing my condition. I cut him short and ordered him to assemble the rest of my band and have my horses saddled with the utmost expedition. I commanded Jacques to leave all my bag-

gage and we were ready for departure, before any of the Comte's household, excepting the servants, were aroused.

In raw and foggy daylight we rode out of the courtyard and down the road that led from Riennes.

I will finish this event in my memories here, though I must traverse six years to do so. The other day, while on a protracted visit to London, I was sitting in White's coffee-house when Jacques brought me the papers that I have sent me regularly from France. In one of them was a notice which so much engaged my attention that I lost all account of the conversation around me. My Lord Selborne asked me what news I found so engrossing. I read aloud: 'In the French Juras a nun, youngest daughter of the ancient and noble family of R——, has been tried and found guilty of sorcery. She was burnt at the stake. The nun's two sisters are also in the religious life, and the eldest, who is in the same convent, fell under suspicion for some time but has been cleared. In fact so many arrests were made both within the convent and through the whole countryside that it was found impossible to prosecute them all, lest the whole district of R——, the scene of these horrors, should require to be burnt.'

Here my lord interrupted me with expressions of horror that France, even in her remotest provinces, should still be so barbarously superstitious as to burn a woman of quality for a witch.

'In England,' he remarked, 'we got over such whimsies in the time of the Stuarts, and since then the women, God bless 'em, have been allowed to enchant with impunity.'

That very able man, Monsieur Voltaire the playwright, who was then on his visit to England, burst forth in great indignation against the priest-ridden laws of our country that could make such executions possible. What could it matter, he declared, if an ignorant peasantry, rebelling against the tedium of its miserable existence, cared at certain seasons to make a bonfire, dress up one of their number as the Devil, put masks on the rest, and indulge in the mummary of the Witches' Sabbath?

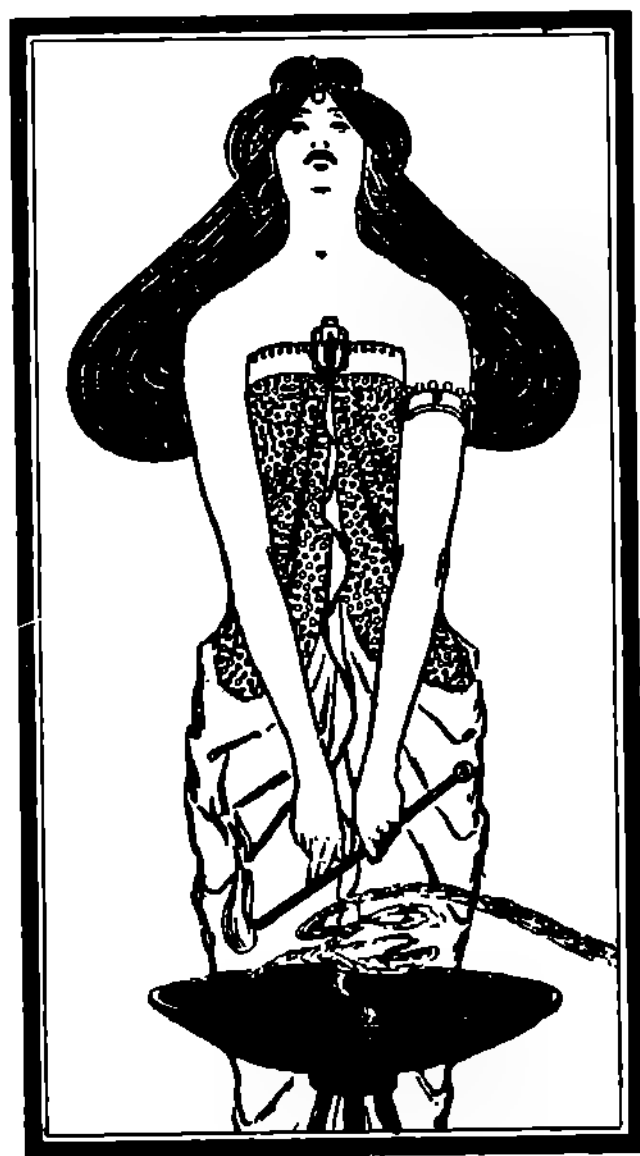
In his grandfather's day, sorcery had been a fashion extending even to the *noblesse* and gentry; the trial of La Voisin, the famous sorceress and prisoner, had implicated hundreds, even, it was whispered, the King's reigning sweetheart, Madame de Montespan herself. Whole villages, indeed whole districts in the Basques and Juras, had been devastated by the laws against witchcraft, and it had proved impossible to deal with all the witches that had been arrested.

'But witchcraft amounted to more than mummary,' declared

one Mr. Calthrop. 'On my own estate in my father's time a stone was thrown at an old woman's dog and the mark was found on *her* body.'

Monsieur Voltaire waved this aside. He had heard many such instances and did not deny that there was foundation for them. Such people as believed themselves to be witches were certainly abnormal, and they, and the animals they used as their ministers, might well have abnormal powers. But he was certain that the world did not yet fully realize the powers of thought and belief. He considered it possible that future ages would attribute such instances of unnatural sympathy between a witch and her familiars to an unnatural state of mind and body. He addressed his remarks chiefly to me, but I did not answer them.

In spite of the fact that as I am now approaching my thirty-first year, middle age is hard upon me. I have still to find a wife to carry on my family.



THE WITCH CHARMER

'I will relate to you some examples, which I have gained in part from the teachers of our faculty, in part from the experience of a certain upright secular judge, worthy of all faith, who from the torture and confessions of witches and from his experiences in public and private has learned many things of this sort—a man with whom I have often discussed this subject broadly and deeply—to wit, Peter, a citizen of Berne, in the diocese of Lausanne, who has burned many witches of both sexes, and has driven others out of the territory of the Bernese. I have moreover conferred with one Benedict, a monk of the Benedictine order, who, although now a very devout cleric in a reformed monastery at Vienna, was a decade ago, while still in the world, a necromancer, juggler, buffoon, and strolling player, well known as the delight of village children everywhere.'

From the 15th century *Formicarius* of Johannes Nider, the Dominican theologian who provided the clue that magic might form the basis of one of the most famous of all German legends. . . .

The Rhythm of the Rats

ERIC FRANK RUSSELL

The village of despair lay in a fold of tree-shrouded hills. Its name shall not be spoken, neither shall its nationality be told. There are those among us whose curiosity knows no restraint; others who are magnetically drawn by the dreadful. One must tell the tale in manner calculated to protect the foolish from their follies or not tell it at all. Suffice to say that the village was placed far off the beaten track even of foot-walking tourists, and its brooding inhabitants did not speak English on those rare occasions when they spoke at all.

There were sixty houses in the village, one-third of them straggling alongside the cattle-track which served as its main road, the rest climbing the heights behind and lurking half-hidden in a welter of pines, firs and mountain ash. All these abodes were of timber, highly ornamented, and would have been considered picturesque had they not oozed an elusive but easily sensed aura of overwhelming sadness.

Quiet, slow-moving folk lived in this forgotten hamlet, passing each other silently in the course of their daily tasks, fix-faced, fix-eyed, unemotional in the manner of those long emptied of human passions. Spiritual wells run dry forever. Shadow-people almost without substance.

I found this place by veritable accident. A plane crashed amid pines close behind the ruined castle of the Giant Ghormandel. Flung headlong into flexible pine which caught me, waved me to and fro before it dropped me into a bed of ferns, I was the sole survivor.

The plane crackled and spat and flared furiously a little lower down the hill. Adjacent tree trunks exploded like cannon under pressure of boiling sap and resin. Ferns withered, turned brown and paperlike, became flames. Rabbits scuttled in all directions,

weasels with them. Birds whirled away squawking. Smoke poured cloud-high. Blackened bodies posed roasting in the fuselage, and the pilot—still in his cockpit—sat with bowed and steaming head. It was terrible.

To tell the truth, the scene sickened me far more than did the narrowness of my own escape. That sudden, unwanted cremation amid the trees, with the castle ruins grinning like rotten teeth, and the dark, unfriendly green of the hills, the scowling skies all made a scene such as one carries for the remainder of one's life. It was a picture of death, red and rampant.

There was nothing I could do to help anyone, nothing at all. The plane's complement already was far beyond human assistance. Somewhat bruised and considerably shocked, but otherwise unharmed, I made my way down the hillside and found a tiny brook which I followed as it meandered through a thickly forested area that still sloped, though gradually. The atmosphere grew heavier, more morbid as I descended. By the time the village was near the air had become thick, oppressive and lay like a weight upon my mind. It created that unpleasant sensation of an impending headache that never manages to arrive.

A smell of wood-smoke came from the village although no chimney was visibly active. Not the pleasing, aromatic scent which greets one in wood-burning communities, but rather an acrid odour suggesting the combustion of rotting bark and dried fungi.

Four people saw me as I came by the end pair of houses. Two men, two women, all middle-aged. Their attire was well cared for in the matter of stitching and patching but the colours had long faded toward dark browns and greys. It was sartorial companionship for the colours of their souls, all browns and greys. The two men bore shepherds' crooks; the women carried brass-bound wooden buckets. All four looked at me with the subdued surprise of those who have not registered a true emotion for countless years.

As I came up to them, the elder man said swiftly to the others, speaking in a language I could understand, 'Something has gone wrong. Leave this to me.' He took a step towards me, lifting his brows inquiringly.

I told him about the plane, pointing to the castle of the Giant Ghormandel and the pale, thin wisp of smoke creeping upward behind it. My speech was swift, rather incoherent, and made with complete disregard of grammatical rules of a language which was not my own. Nevertheless, he got the gist of it. Events must have tried me more than I'd realized, for immediately

it was evident that he understood, I felt weak in the pit of my stomach and sat in the cattle-track to beat myself to the fall. The world commenced whirling as he bent to support me, stooping over me like a mighty ghost.

Later, it could not have been much later, I found myself in bed staring at a row of copper pots lined upon the mantelshelf, and a religious picture on the wall. The pots were dull but not dusty. The picture was faded, a little spotty. The window curtains had been darned but not dyed; they swayed in a slight draught, old and colourless. Even the wallpaper had been carefully stuck down where it tended to curl but was so aged that it should have been replaced years before. The general impression was not one of extreme poverty, but rather of tidiness which has been brought to its minimum in terms of bare necessity, a natural neatness which has been deprived of heart by causes unknown.

Presently the man to whom I had spoken came in. Let him be called Hansi because that was not his name. He came to my bed, blank-faced as a wooden image, and addressed me in tones devoid of vibrancy. It was like hearing the mechanical voice of an automaton.

'You are feeling better?'

I nodded. 'Yes, thank you.'

'That is good.' He hesitated, went on. 'Had you any friends or relations in that machine?'

'None.'

If he was surprised he did not show it. His eyes turned toward me, turned away. He thought awhile.

'We have sent a party to recover the bodies. The authorities will be notified as soon as possible.'

'You could telephone them,' I suggested.

'There is no telephone. There is no car. There is nothing.' He said it in a dull monotone.

'Then how do you—?'

'We walk. Did not the good God give us legs with which to walk? So we walk along eighteen miles of tracks and woodland trails and across two rope bridges to the nearest telephone. No vehicle can get here. The bodies will have to be carried out.' His eyes came back again. 'As you will have to be carried if you cannot walk.'

'I can walk,' I told him.

'Eighteen miles?' His eyebrows rose a little.

'Well . . . well—' I hesitated.

'It is a pity the hour is so late,' he continued, staring at the window as if it framed something pertaining to his remark. 'Night

comes upon us very soon. If you had been here earlier we might have got you away before the fall of darkness. But now—he shook his head slowly—‘it is impossible. You must stay—one night.’ He repeated it, making it significant. ‘One night.’

‘I don’t mind,’ I assured.

‘We do!’

I sat up, putting my legs out of bed and pressing my feet on the floor to feel the firmness of it. ‘Why?’

‘There are reasons,’ he evaded. Going to the window, he peered out. Then he closed the window, doing it with considerable care, making sure that it latched tightly and that the latch was firmly home. Finally he fastened the latch with a strong padlock. It was now impossible to open the casement, while its panes were far too small to permit escape after the glass had been removed. Patting the pocket in which he had put the key, he remarked, ‘That is that!’

After watching this performance I had a deep and frightening sense of imprisonment. It must have shown in my features, but he chose to ignore it.

Facing me, he asked, ‘Do you like music?’

‘Some,’ I admitted.

His lips thinned, drew back to expose white teeth, and he said with a sudden and surprising venom that shocked me, ‘I hate music! We all hate music!’

This contrast with his previous impassiveness lent a terrible emphasis to his words. It was an uncontrolled burst of passion from a source I’d mistakenly thought dried up. It had all the elements of the unexpected, unnerving the listener as if he had heard and seen a marble statue part its lips and curse loudly.

‘I hate music! We all hate music!’

Without saying more, he went away.

Some ten or fifteen minutes afterward I decided that boredom served only to enhance hunger. The recent disaster still affected me, the thick, cloying atmosphere weighed heavily upon me. I needed something to eat and I yearned for company other than that of my own thoughts. Putting on shoes, I pulled open the only door and left the room.

Going slowly down an ornate but unpolished wooden staircase, I reached a small hall. A dull fire glowed at one end, gave off the acrid smell noticed earlier. Nearby, a crudely wrought table was covered with a grey cloth. The walls were panelled, without picture or ornament of any kind. A book case full of dusty, seldom-used tomes stood at one side.

There had been time only to survey all this when a woman appeared through an archway at the other end. She was forty or thereabouts, tall, slender and as sad-faced as any yet seen. Though her features remained set, a most peculiar expression lurked within her eyes as she looked at me, a sort of hunger, an intense yearning tempered and held in check by horror.

All she said was, 'You wish for food?' and her eyes tried to draw me to her while, at the same time, thrusting me away.

'Yes, lady,' I admitted, watching her and wondering what lay behind that peculiar gaze. Her desire for me was in no way embarrassing. Indeed, I felt within me that it was clean, decent, but pitiful because of its thwarting.

Without another word she turned, went in to the kitchen beyond the arch, came back with black bread, heather-honey and fresh milk. I sat at the table and enjoyed my meal as best I could despite that she spent the whole time standing near the fire and eating me with her eyes. She did not speak again until I had finished.

'If you go outside you must be back before dark, well before dark.'

'All right, lady.' Anything to please her. Inwardly, I could conceive no prospect more dismal than that of wandering around this village after dark. It was dispiriting enough in broad daylight.

For some time, I don't know how long since I did not possess a watch, I explored the hamlet, studied its houses, its people. The longer I looked at them the more depressed I felt. Their abodes were strangely devoid of joy. The folk were quite uncommunicative without being openly unsociable. None spoke to me, though several women looked with the same hungry horror displayed by the one in Hansi's house. It was almost as if they desired something long forbidden and triply accursed, something of which I was the living witness, therefore to be both wanted and feared.

My own uneasiness grew toward twilight. It was the accumulative effect of all this unnaturalness plus the gradual realization that the village was lacking in certain respects. It had vacuums other than spiritual ones. Certain features normal to village life were missing; I could *feel* them missing without being able to decide what they were.

Not until dusk began to spread and I reached the door of Hansi's house did it come to my mind that no truly domestic animals had been visible. The place was devoid of them. I had seen a small herd of cattle and a few mountain goats, but not one cat, not one dog.

A moment later it struck me with awful force that neither had I seen a child. That was what was wrong—not a child!

Indoors, the tall woman gave me supper, early though the hour. As before, she hung around pathetically wanting and not-wanting. Once she patted my shoulder as if to say. 'There! There!' then hurriedly whipped her hand away. My mind concocted a scarey notion of her quandary; that to give comfort was to pass sentence of death. It frightened me. How foolish it is to frighten oneself.

Soon after total darkness Hansi came in, glanced at me, asked the woman, 'Are the casements fastened? All of them?'

'Yes, I have seen to them myself.'

It did not satisfy him. Methodically he went around trying the lot, upstairs and downstairs. The woman seemed to approve rather than resent this implied slur upon her capabilities. After testing each and every latch and lock Hansi departed without another word.

Selecting a couple of books from the case, I bore them up to my room, closed the door, examined the window. The latch had been so shaped as to fit into a hasp, and the padlock linking the two was far beyond my strength to force open. So far as could be told, all other windows were secured in similar manner.

The place was a prison. Or perhaps a madhouse. Did they secretly consider me insane? Could it be that they had not actually gone to the wrecked plane because they thought my story a lunatic's fancy? Or, conversely, were they themselves not of sound mind? Had fate plunged me into some sort of national reservation for people who were unbalanced? If so, when—and how—was I going to escape?

Beyond my window ran a footpath edging the gloomy firs and pines that mounted to the top of a hill. The woods were thick, the path narrow and shadowy, but a rising moon gradually illuminated the lot until one could see clearly. It was there, right outside my window, that I saw what will remain in my worst dreams forever.

The books had amused me for three hours with a compost of outlandish stories and simply expressed folk-tales of such a style that evidently they were intended for juveniles. Tiring, I turned down the oil-lamp, had a last look out of the window before going to bed.

The two men were strolling along the path, one bearing a thick cudgel held ready on his shoulder, the other carrying a gun. Opposite my window they paused, looked into the trees. Their attitudes suggested expectancy, wariness and stubborn challenge. Nothing happened.

Continuing their patrol, they went three or four paces, stopped. One of them felt in his pocket, bent down and appeared to be fumbling around the region of his own boots. I had my cheek close against the cold glass as I strove to see what he was doing. A moment later I discovered that he was feeding a small rat which was sitting on its haunches and taking his offerings in paws shaped like tiny hands.

They walked on. The rat followed, gambolling behind them, its eyes gleaming fitfully in the moonlight and resembling little red beads. Just as the two men passed out of my sight several more rats emerged from the undergrowth and ran eagerly in the same direction.

Sneaking out of the door, I crossed a passage, entered the front room which was furnished but unoccupied. This room's windows overlooked the cattle-truck which formed the main stem. In due time the two men returned to view, complete with cudgel and gun. They had the wary bearing of an armed patrol performing a regular and essential duty.

Eight rats, all small and crimson-eyed, followed very close upon their heels.

As they neared my vantage point a woman came out of the house right opposite, seated herself on its step and tossed titbits from a large bag on her lap. Rats swarmed around her, scuttling grey shapes that came from the shadows and darker places.

I could not hear their excited squeaking; the casement was too close-fitting for that. The woman reached out her hand and petted one or two and they responded by fawning upon her. If only the light had been stronger I am sure it would have revealed her formerly pale, wan face now glowing with love...love for the rats.

Daytime surliness, secret fear, a mixed desire and revulsion for the lonely stranger, night-time affection for rats—what did all these things mean? It was too much for me. I had nothing in common with isolated mountain folk such as these. Tomorrow, at all costs, I must get away.

By this time the patrolling men had passed on and the woman was alone with her rodents. Returning to my own room, I had another look at the path, saw nothing other than a solitary rat which ran across as if anxious to join its fellows in the village. The moon was a little higher, its light a little stronger. Dark conifers posed file on file, a silent army awaiting the order to descend the hill.

I went to bed, lay there full of puzzled, apprehensive thoughts, and—let me confess it—nervous, uneasy, too restless to sleep. As the night-hours crawled tediously on and the moonbeams strength-

ened, the air grew lighter, colder, less oppressive, more invigorating.

This peculiarity of the atmosphere waxed so greatly that it created a strange tenseness within me, an inexplicable feeling of expecting something grave and imminent. So powerful did this sensation become that eventually I found myself sitting up in bed, cold and jumpy, ears straining for they knew not what, eyes upon the brilliant window which at any moment might frame a face like none seen before in this or any other world.

That such pointless but wideawake anxiety was silly, I knew full well, yet I could not help it, could not control it. I strove to divert my mind by wondering whether that woman was still bestowing love upon her rats, and by listening for the passing footsteps of the patrol.

Then, as my eyes remained fixed upon the casement, something came through as easily as did the moonbeams. One moment there was the utter silence of a waiting world; the next, it was through the window and in the room with me.

It was nothing that I could see. It could only be heard and then not with the ears. Insidiously it penetrated the locked timber frame and tight panes of the casement, pierced the very walls of the house, passed through the bones of my skull and registered deep within my mind. A thin, reedy fluting which sounded sweet and low.

So soft and surreptitious was the sound that at first I mistook it for a figment of the imagination; but as I sat and stared at the window the music persisted and gradually swelled as if its source were creeping nearer, nearer.

Presently it was quite loud though still within my mind and completely unhearable with my ears. It waxed and waned, joyful and plaintive by turns, sobbing down the scale and chuckling up it, weeping a little and laughing a lot. An outlandish theme ran through its trills and flourishes as a cord runs through a string of pearls. There was a weird rhythm beating steadily within the tones and half-tones, a haunting off-beat, fascinating, mind-trapping—and beckoning, continually beckoning.

Somehow I knew that it was for my mind alone, that others in the village would not hear what I could hear. It went on and on, calling me, summoning me, and its spasms of laughter drove away all fear until I wanted to laugh with it, carefree and joyously. So powerful was its attraction that it drew me from bed, towards the window where I stood and stared into the moonlight. There was nothing voluntary about that action. My bemused mind obeyed the urge without previous thought; my legs responded to my mind and bore me to the window. I got there with no remembrance of the going. I merely arrived.

The pines and firs still stood in close array. The path was clearly lit and completely empty. Not a soul was to be seen, yet the eerie music continued without let or pause and the whole world seemed to be waiting, waiting for some unguessable culmination.

My face was pressed close against the glass, almost trying to push through it and get me nearer, if only an inch nearer, to that glorified flood of notes. The lilt chimed and tinkled like fairy bells within my brain, and as it repeated again and again its quality of attraction grew progressively stronger. It was a case of familiarity breeding desire where, had I only known the truth, there would have been unutterable horror and a mighty fear.

At moments the tonal sequences suggested speech though I could hear no actual words. But words came with them into my mind from I knew not where, insinuated with wondrous cunning beyond my capacity to understand. It was as if certain ecstatic chords conjured parallel phrases, creating a dreadful dream-poetry which percolated through the night.

*Oh come and tread the lazy leaves
And dance through scented heather,
Play hide and seek amid the sheaves,
Or vault the hills together.
Cast care away before the dawn;
With me for everlasting
Run free while mothers sit and mourn
A little rat . . .*

I lost the run of words just then because a brief glimpse of colour showed between the standing trees while the music grew enormously both in volume and enticement. My whole attention remained riveted upon the trees until shortly a being stepped forth and posed full in the light of the moon.

Tall and terribly thin, he wore a bi-coloured jerkin of lurid yellow and red with a peaked and feathered cap to match. Even his up-pointed slippers were coloured, one yellow, one red. A slender flute was in his hands, one end to his mobile lips, the other aimed straight at my window. His long, supple fingers moved with marvellous dexterity as he subjected me to a musical stream of irresistible invitation.

His face! I looked upon it and did not cease to look upon it all the time I tore at the casement's latch, heaved upon its chain, struggled desperately to burst the lock asunder. I wanted to get out, how madly, insanely I wanted to get out, to run free beneath

the moon, to dance and prance, to mope and mow, to gabble and gesticulate and vault the hills while mothers mourned.

Unknown to me, my own voice alternately moaned my mortification and shouted my rage at being thwarted while I lugged and tugged in crazy endeavour to tear the window wide open. My ears were incapable of hearing my own noises, or any others for that matter. I was concentrating tremendously and exclusively upon that magnetic tune coming from outside and the moonlit visage of him who was producing it. A pane of glass broke into a hundred shards and blood flowed on my hand, yet I saw nothing but the face, heard nothing but its song.

It was an idiot face with enormous laughing eyes. A drooling, drooping, loose-hung, imbecilic countenance in which the optics shone with clownish merriment. It was the face of my friend, my brother, my mother, my boon companion, my comrade of the night, my only joyful ally in this sullen hostile world. The face of him without whom I would be utterly alone, in ghastly solitude, for ever and ever, to the very end of time. I wanted him. Heavens, how hungrily I wanted him! Beating at the window, I screamed my desperate need for him.

There were feet moving below somewhere within the house, and heavy feet coming upstairs, hurriedly, responding to a sudden urgency. If my ears heard them they did not tell me. I stood in the full, cold glare of moonlight and hammered futilely at my prison bars and drank in that idiot face still uttering its piping call to come away and play.

Just as someone pushed open my bedroom door the flute-player made one swift and graceful step backwards into the trees. At the same moment there came from the side of the house to my left a tremendous crash like that of an ancient and overloaded blunderbuss. Leaves, twigs and bits of branches sprang away from the trees and showered over the yellow-red figure.

The music ceased at once. To me its ending was as awful as the loss of the sun, leaving a world swamped in darkness. Verily a light-o'-laughter had become extinguished and there was nothing around me but the grey-brown souls of the immeasurably sad.

I clawed and scrabbled at the casement in futile effort to bring back the magic notes, but while the torn leaves still were drifting the fluter receded farther into the shadows and was gone. Once, twice there was a gleam of colour, yellow and red, in the tree gaps higher up the hill. After that, no other sign. He had escaped to a haunt unknown; he had gone with his calling pipe and his sloppy face and his great grinning eyes.

Hansi came behind me, snatched me away from the window,

threw me on the bed. His big chest was heaving but his features were as though set in stone. Having reached its extreme my emotional pendulum was now on its back-swing, a revulsion was making itself felt. I offered no resistance to Hansi, made no protest, but lay on the bed and watched him while my mind incubated a terrible fear born of the narrowness of my escape.

Moving a heavy, wheel-back chair near to the window, Hansi sat himself in it, showed clearly that he was there for the remainder of the night. He did not say a word. His bearing was that of one whose only weapon against powers of darkness is an uncompromising stubbornness.

Increasing coldness persuaded me to pull the bedcovers over myself. I lay flat on my back, perspiring freely and shivering at the same time, and vaguely sensing the stickiness of partially congealed blood on one hand. Sounds from outside came clearly through the broken pane; a dull snapping of trodden twigs, stamping of boots, mutter of voices as hunters sought in vain for the body of the hunted.

Soon I went to sleep, exhausted with a surfeit of nervous strain. Dreams came to me, some muddled and inconsequential, one topical and horribly vivid. In that one I was blissfully running at the heels of a prancing imbecile, drinking in his never ending song and following him through dell and thicket, across moonlit glades and streams, climbing higher always higher until we reached Ghormandel's shattered walls. And there he turned and looked at me, still piping. I was small, very small—and had a thin, hairless tail.

They rushed me away with the morning. I had breakfast in a hurry, set off with Hansi and a solemn, lantern-jawed man named Klaus. A few women stood at their doorways and watched me go, their eyes yearning and spurning precisely as they had done before. I felt that they regretted my departure and yet were glad, immensely glad. One waved to me and I waved back. No other responded. The sadness of the village deepened as we left, deepened to an awful sorrow too soul searing to forget.

One hour's march, fifteen minutes' rest; one hour's march, fifteen minutes' rest. At a steady pace of three miles an hour the trip was easy. By the fourth rest-period the giant's castle had shrunk to no more than a faintly discernible excrescence upon a distant rise. I sat on a stone, watched the nearest trees and listened with my mind.

'Hansi, who was it that came in the night?'

'Forget him,' he advised curtly.

I persisted, 'Does he belong to the ruined castle?'

'In a way.' He got up, prepared to move on. 'Forget him—it is best.'

We continued on our way. I noticed that neither man eyed the trees as I eyed them, nor listened as I listened. They progressed in stolid silence, following the path, looking neither to the right nor left. It seemed to be accepted that by day they were free from that which was to be feared by night.

Mid-afternoon, footsore but not tired, we arrived at a small country town. It may have been sleepy and backward, but by my standards it was full of vivacity and sophistication. One could not help but contrast its bustling liveliness with the dreary, anaemic place from which I had come.

Hansi had a long talk with the police who made several telephone calls, gave me a meal, filled up forms which Hansi signed. They issued me with a train-ticket. Hansi accompanied me to the station. There, I used half an hour's wait to pester him again.

'Who was it? Tell me!'

He gave in reluctantly, speaking like one forced to discuss a highly distasteful subject. 'He is the son of his father and the son of his mother.'

'Of course,' I scoffed. 'What else could he be?'

Ignoring me, he went on, 'Long ago his mother used her evil arts to kill his father Ghormandel. From then on she ruled the roost by fire, bell, candle and incantation—until our reckless forefathers had had enough of her.' He paused a moment, stared dully at the sky. 'Whereupon they trapped her by trickery and burned her for the foul old witch she was.'

'Oh!' I felt a cold shiver on me.

'And then they hunted her son, her only child, who was half-wizard, half-witch, but he escaped. Hiding in a place afar, he developed his dark talents and bided his time for vengeance.'

'Go on,' I urged as he showed signs of leaving it at that.

'When he was ready, he tested his powers in a distant town. They worked perfectly. So he came back to us . . . and took away our children.'

'What?'

'He charmed them away,' said Hansi, grim and bitter. 'Every one but those able only to crawl—and even those strove to squirm from us. From that day to this he has slunk around like a beast in the night, waiting, always waiting. Most of our women are afraid to have children. The few who dare have to send them to distant relatives until they reach adulthood or, alternatively, lock them in the *kinderhaus* between every dusk and dawn.' He

glanced at me. 'Where I was locked for many years. Where you were locked last night.'

'Only at night?' I asked.

He nodded. 'There is no peril by day. Why, I do not know. But always he is ready by night, ready to take a child—and give us back another rat!'

'You mean . . . he changes them?'

'We cannot say for certain. We suspect it. We fear it.' His big hand clenched into a knotted fist. A vein stood out on his forehead. 'Children have gone, fix-eyed, with outreaching hands, like blind ones feeling their way—and rats have come back, tame, playful, wanting food and mother-love.' His voice deepened, became harsh. 'Some day we shall deal with him as our forefathers dealt with the witch who bore him. If the people of that distant town had killed him when he was in their hands—'

'What town?'

He said, briefly but devastatingly, 'Hamelin.'

Then the train came in.

At this date I often wonder whether the stones of the Giant Ghormandel's castle still rot upon that fateful hill; whether far beneath them lies that accursed village in which it is dangerous to be born. I wonder, too, whether that long, lean shape in red and yellow yet roams light-footed beneath the moon, laughing and gibbering and piping its terrible invitation.

So far, I have had no desire to return and see for myself. The elements of dread are stronger than curiosity despite the fact that the passage of years has made it safe for me to go. It was anything but safe when I was there. Then, I had needed the watchful protection of the sad ones at a mere nine years of age.

SEX MAGIC

'To avoid getting drunk and losing your senses during seduction, secretly take a roasted pig's lung beforehand and eat five slices from it.'

Your love-making will greatly improve if you do give a maiden to wear a girdle which has been anointed with the oil of St. John's wort plant.

To increase the size of a woman's breasts: one small vessel of purified honey and half a small vessel of melted lard (i.e., two parts honey to one part lard) and mix them together, and boil it until it is as thick as pottage, because it will grow clearer on account of the lard. Also dry some beans and grind them to a powder and add this to the mixture. Rub this mixture on the breasts before going to sleep and they will grow larger during the night.'

From a a fifteenth-century volume,
The Leechbook, a copy of which
was found in the library of the
Marquis de Sade.



The Magic Potion

JEROME BIXBY

Pierre, the apothecary, opened his shop one morning quite as usual. It was winter. No winter on earth is worse than winter in Paris—a grey sky, like a distant, dripping, icy dome; muddy slush up to one's trembling knees; a chill wind along narrow streets breathing discontent wherever it touches—and it touches everywhere.

Pierre's spirits were accordingly bleak. Having opened the door and entered, he kicked it shut. He clapped his mittened hands together and hastily built a fire in the stove. He huddled over the feeble heat, glaring around at his shelves of drugs and herbs and powders and salves—his hated apothecary shop.

He detested it as a symbol of the failure of his life. Oh, it was a moderately successful business; a living. But Pierre felt that he had been destined for greater things. Somewhere along the line, Fate had fumbled and dropped him underfoot.

Item: he had been born into a wealthy family, but the wealth had vanished before his eighteenth birthday, due to ill-advised stock management.

Item: his taste ran to the very best in women, but he was not good-looking enough to win them nor clever enough to fascinate them and, alas, not rich enough to buy them.

Item: he had once been a fairly robust physical specimen, and had enjoyed sports until that one damnable night when a carriage had rolled on him and crippled his right leg.

Still, it is not necessary to feel too sorry for Pierre. Despite his hard luck, he really wasn't a very sympathetic fellow. Born of the rich, he had kept his arrogance, though he cloaked it with middle-class cordiality. He could have won more women than he did, had not his lecherous demeanor repelled many prospects partway through the seduction procedures. Even when the carriage had

overturned, he had been in the act of betraying his best friend with the latter's intoxicated wife.

Resenting everything about his life, he took it out on others. He was never generous. He was rarely fair. He was often surly. He always cheated on potions and prescriptions, giving customers less than their money's worth.

His first customer, this grey morning, was a sickly little fellow who seemed barely to have the strength to push open the door. Pierre smiled at him; he liked to see people worse off than himself, and this one seemed ripe for burial. Tuberculosis, Pierre judged accurately. And jaundice. And God knew what else. But he was very well dressed.

'Make this up for me,' the little man whispered as he pushed a slip of paper across the counter. He was not old; he only appeared old. And he was not bad looking; he was only haggard.

Pierre studied it and then looked up, puzzled. 'This is not a physician's prescription,' he said.

The man smiled. 'Correct. It is a concoction you will mix for me—and for which I shall pay you 500 francs. That should persuade you to disregard the unorthodox nature of the transaction, should it not?'

'Indeed!' Pierre agreed hastily. 'But—what is it? I recognize the ingredients . . . but this combination of them, in these proportions . . . it makes no sense to me!'

The little man ignored the question. He sat down in the chair by the window. 'I will wait,' he said calmly. 'It should take eight minutes.'

'An excellent guess,' Pierre said, turning to his shelves.

'It is not a guess,' the man said.

Intrigued, Pierre mixed the concoction. It contained sulphur, pepper, oil of wintergreen, garlic extract, iron salts, and so on and on. Pierre was so intrigued that he doubled the formula, keeping the extra batch for himself. Later, when he found time, he would run tests on it, to determine what its purpose could be.

The little man paid the 500 francs, took the bottle of strange brew and the paper with the formula, and went away.

A week later, he came back. Pierre was mixing a prescription. When he looked up and saw the fantastic change that had occurred in the little man, he was so astonished that he almost dropped his mortar and pestle.

The man, so sickly the week before, was now the picture of perfect health! His eyes were clear. His cheeks glowed. The yellow caste of jaundice had vanished from his skin. He had

gained weight. His carriage was straighter, his walk stronger, his voice firmer.

'Make this for me, please,' he said, pushing another slip of paper across the counter. 'I will pay you another 500 francs.'

'Then—' Pierre gasped. 'Then it is you! But *mon Dieu!*—what has happened! You were consumptive, were you not? You were extremely ill! And now, you are a *new man*. . . .'

'Very nearly,' the man smiled. 'Yes, I was all those things. Now, my good sir, please make this concoction for me. Do as good a job again, and I shall be your steady customer. My name, by the way, is François Dubois.'

'*Mon cher Monsieur Dubois,*' Pierre shook hands across the counter, totalling francs in his mind, 'permit me to congratulate you on your recovery!'

'Quite,' Dubois replied. 'Quite. I shall wait, again.'

After the little man had left, Pierre stared at the two batches of mysterious stuff . . . the one from a week before; the other, the extra half of today's mixture which he had kept.

The time for investigation had come.

Pierre may have been many things, but he was not a coward. He stared at the first mixture—the one he had made a week ago.

'Surely *this* could not have cured his complex of illnesses,' he muttered to himself. 'Yet, I must proceed on that premise . . . so . . . I shall take a *taste*. . . .'

He did so; a drop of the stuff on the end of a glass rod.

It should have tasted horrible, considering what was in it.

It tasted like nectar—ambrosia—it thrilled his tongue and throat. Then it reached his stomach and spread a pervading warmth throughout his body, tingling his extremities.

Suddenly he gasped in agony and bent to clutch his right leg. He moaned as aches and pains shot through and through the crippled member . . .

And then he gasped again, for he had forgotten. Due to the ruin of certain nerves, he had felt no sensation in that leg since the accident! And *now—now* . . .

Without hesitation, he reached for the beakerful of mysterious stuff and drank it down in a gulp.

He fainted from pain . . . but what joyous pain!

Two hours later, he awoke. Fortunately it was Friday night, the night he stayed open late, in order to mix preparations and take inventory against the coming week. He had had no customers, to discover him on the floor.

He tried the leg. For the first time in eleven years, it supported

him. And he could *feel* it! He walked around the shop, gingerly at first, then with growing confidence. Even the bone seemed to have magically straightened!

Magically.

The little man's concoctions must have been . . .

Lord knows where he had found his formulas, but Pierre would make it his business to find out! He would become the greatest healer in France—in the world! He would be a millionaire! He rushed to look at himself in the mirror. Yes . . . *yes!* His eyes were clearer, his cheeks fuller; his indigestion was gone; *even a cavity in a tooth had vanished!* He looked ten years younger. He *was* ten years younger, if not more.

Then his eyes lit on the second mysterious preparation.

Just as Pierre was not a coward, neither was he stupid.

'Once a man has perfect health,' he mused, 'what, then, is next on his mind? Money?' He touched his finger to the beaker. 'No magic such as this can bring wealth, for money is only metal and paper, and this is intended to work on human interior organs. So?' His eyes glowed, as he came to his conclusion.

The shop-bell rang. A very late customer, but not unprecedented, Pierre thought as he looked up.

It was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen.

Young, yet with wisdom in her eyes. Blonde, yet with reddish highlights in the lamp's glow. Dressed expensively and in impeccable taste. A very rich woman, at least; possibly a noblewoman. Full red lips and a patrician nose, and a delicately-formed but ample *poitrine* that curled Pierre's hands into iron hooks beneath the counter.

'Forgive me, kind sir,' she said, in a voice like music in a bedroom, 'If I should keep you from closing your shop at this late hour. But I am so cold. My carriage has lost its wheel, or bearing, or some ridiculous thing. My coachmen are repairing it at the corner, but really, I could not wait there with the freezing wind cutting like a knife.'

'But, no!' Pierre said in grand courtesy. 'My humble shop is yours, until you are able to be on your way! Please, let me give you a seat.'

She accepted his chair by the window, whisked to her instantly by his eager hand. But something in his voice caught her attention and she listened more carefully. In her woman's wisdom, she knew him as a lecher. She peered out of the frosty window. Nor were her eyes much warmer than frost.

'They will be finished shortly,' she said. 'I am grateful.'

As has been noted, Pierre's fancy ran to elegant women. And

this girl—almost without a doubt a nobleman's daughter—was the most desirable creature he had ever seen.

He thought of that second concoction, back on his shelves, and the purpose he had theoretically assigned to it.

Experimentation is the basis of life, he thought.

'Permit me,' he said, 'to offer you something to take away the chill. A harmless stimulant. Very helpful in case of cold.'

'No, really . . .' she said, and then she shivered, 'I *am* cold. Yes I believe I will . . . thank you, kind sir.'

Pierre went to the rear of the shop, concealing his agitation. He poured a few drops of the second mixture into a wine glass which he used for his own tippling. He brought it forth.

She looked at it in astonishment. 'But, this is not liquor. What have you given me, dear sir?'

'A preparation of my own,' he said, with his most winning smile. 'I am a fine apothecary, mademoiselle . . . this will brace you as nothing else ever has. You must take it on trust.'

Though she would not have trusted him in her boudoir, she trusted him in his shop—enough to drink the 'bracer.' And that was her error.

Setting the glass down, she smiled at him warmly. 'That *was* good.' She tasted it on her lips with her pink tongue. 'very, *very* good.' She paused. She peered out the window at her carriage near the corner and the flunkies who laboured to fix it. She returned her gaze to Pierre's expectant face and her blue eyes were shining. Her voice lost its aristocratic tone, and purred like a kitten's: 'Surely, while I wait, *monsieur* . . . you would like to show me around your interesting shop?'

Pierre's heart leaped. 'The most interesting things are to be seen in the back room, mademoiselle.'

She put her warm hand in his, rising gracefully. 'I look forward with great eagerness to the interesting things you will show me. Perhaps, I, in turn, may show you some interesting things you do not know.'

'If I do not know them,' Pierre said, leading her, and turning off the shop's lamp with his other hand, 'I shall learn them.' And so saying, he led her into the darkness of the back room, with its tiny cot where he often slept.

And there in the back room, surrounded by shelves loaded with the mysterious drugs and herbs that only a pharmacist may comprehend, she sat demurely on the cot while Pierre explained his art to her.

'This,' he said, 'is excellent for gout, and this for early malaria.'

'But,' she murmured, 'have you no prescription for passion?'

'Ah, passion . . .'

'It is a common feminine ailment.'

'And I have a remedy,' Pierre whispered, 'which you must try without question and judge thereafter.'

'I shall trust to your skill,' she said as she lay back upon the pillow.

Never had Pierre prescribed more successfully than he did for her passion. Nor had any prescription required such constant renewal. At last, however, he saw her to the door; their final kiss was breathless and consuming, as he wished her goodnight.

A week later, the small man entered the shop again. A lovely young lady accompanied him, looking at him with adoring eyes. Pierre was not surprised . . . indeed, he understood very, very well. For his own week had been crowded with lovely young ladies—more than he had ever dreamed of—and all of the elegant class. A man less healthy than Pierre would have been exhausted, but Pierre, like his customer, was hale and robust.

'Ah,' he said grandly, 'Monsieur Dubois! And what is your wish today?'

'I have two formulas,' Dubois replied. 'I am undecided as to which to give you.'

'Give me both,' Pierre said, eyes sparkling, 'and only 500 francs! Today, my best customer, I shall give you a deal and do you a favour—two for the price of one!'

'Mmmm,' said Dubois. 'Thank you. Unusual, I might say.' He studied Pierre's face across the counter, noting the unmistakable signs of abundant good health, noting the unmistakable signs of a man who is sexually content. His lips tightened a little.

'Tell me,' Pierre said, as if casually interested. 'Where *do* you get these weird formulas? They are like nothing I have ever seen. What are they *for*? I do hope you'll forgive my professional interest, but curiosity has mounted to an intolerable height.'

'I'm sure,' Dubois murmured. 'Well, to answer your question, I get the formulas from a book.'

'What book?'

'A book you have never heard of, and no doubt will never see. Nor could anyone else make anything of its directives.' Dubois smiled slightly. 'The book is in the library. It is filed under *Magic & Superstition*. The latter term is an insult to its worth, as perceived by the knowing eye. Does that answer your question, apothecary?'

'Of course,' Pierre said, smiling broadly. 'I am sure you understand my natural curiosity . . .'

'Quite.' Dubois handed Pierre a slip of paper. 'Here is the for-

mula I wish prepared. I shall wait.' He seated the beautiful girl by the window.

Heart singing, Pierre went to the rear of the shop. From his shelves, he took down bottles and jars of deadly poisons—one, two, three, a dozen. He mixed them together, helter-skelter. The resulting mess would have assassinated a herd of dinosaurs. Also, he mixed up Dubois' newest concoction, but this he put aside for his own use later.

Yes, Dubois must die. For the book was in the library, with its fantastic secrets—and Pierre would search it out, under *Magic & Superstition*, and the secrets would be secrets no longer. *No!* not if he had to bone up on chemistry for five years!

Dubois must die. Paris was not big enough for two master healers, two irresistible seducers, two *magicians*. There must be only one, and that one must be Pierre.

He gave the poison to Dubois, and received the 500 francs. Dubois and his captive left.

Pierre rushed to the back of the shop and regarded the newest mixture—

Money.

It must pertain to money! What else? After perfect health, and all the women one wanted, what would a man seek? Yes, yes! One of the formulas in the book must have covered the matter of wealth, after all!

Pierre drank.

François Dubois' sighed. He smelled the mess of poison given him by Pierre, and then tossed the jar away, into the Seine. The beautiful girl questioned him. She was perplexed. He patted her and assured her that everything was fine.

The apothecary had tried to poison him.

They always did. They always got smart.

That made nine.

By now, the fool had drunk the poison prescribed on that last slip of paper. He was dead.

Dubois' sighed again. He'd have to find a new apothecary, who would have the skill and the ingredients at hand, many of them regulated by law and unobtainable elsewhere.

Another apothecary. Perhaps in Barbizon. Or anywhere in France.

There were many, many more interesting formulas in the old book. And there was room in France for only one irresistible seducer, one diabolic experimenter, one *magician*. There was room for only one Marquis de Sade.

THE MAGIC MIRROR

'The mirror or urim consists of a pedestal formed according to the rules of the magical science, of a composition termed by the theurgists, electrum magicum, with the word +Elohim+ on the pedestal; in the centre of this is placed a pillar, which supports an oval crystal, or polished surface set in gold, and around which must be inscribed the mighty name of supreme majesty +Tetragrammaton+. Round it are five small crystals, to represent the animal, vegetable, mineral and astral kingdoms, and the one on top to represent the Δ of the Lord. The whole must be preserved in a case free from dust.

When thou wouldest divine by this art, take the mirror from the case, place it on the table with two wax-lights burning beside it, constrain your imagination, and fall down with reverence before the Father in heaven, then having a brazier at hand, filled with hot embers, throw therein frankincense, mastic, benzoin and myrrh, and begin to fumigate to all four parts of the world, and with the incense pan also three times towards the urim, then bend thyself, and devoutly say as follows:

O! TETRAGRAMMATON, thou powerful God and Father! we praise, love, and pray to thee, we also here are collected laying before thee, like poor earth and ashes. We honour thy holy and majestical name, and exclaim with all the saints and elect, three times HOLY, HOLY, HOLY. And with thy brethren place thyself round a table, and remain a little while quite still, each having his eye directed towards the urim, and whatever thou desirest or wishest to see or know, shall be manifested unto thee, and thou shalt become acquainted with all hidden things, and wilt be enabled to see anything that is being done in any part of the world, no matter how distant, or whether past, present or future. But when this is done, all must be kept a profound secret, the lights must be put out and all present must fall down and praise God. This is the hidden mystery of the Magic Mirror.'

Raphael's Astrologer

Legend has it that Alessandro Cagliostro owned a mirror of this kind. A similar type is also described in the Scriptures.

The Mirror of Cagliostro

ROBERT ARTHUR

London, 1910.

The girl's eyes were open. Her face, which had been so softly young, flushed with champagne and excitement, was a thing of horror now. Twisted with shock, contorted with the final spasm of life ejected from the body it had tenanted, her face was a mask of terror, frozen so until the rigor of sudden death should release its hold. Only then would her muscles relax and death be allowed to wipe away the transformation he had wrought.

Charles, Duke of Burchester, wiped his fingers delicately on a silk handkerchief. For a moment, looking down at the girl, Molly Blanchard, his eyes lighted with interest. Was it truly possible that in death the eyes photographed, as he had been told, the last object that sight registered?

He bent over the girl huddled on the crimson carpet of the small private dining-room of Chubb's Restaurant, and stared into the blue eyes that seemed to start from the contorted face. Then he sighed and straightened. It was, after all, a fairy tale. If the story had been true, her dead eyes should have mirrored two tiny, grinning skulls, one in each—for a skull had been the last thing she had seen in life. *His* skull.

But the blue eyes were cold and blank. He had seen in them reflection from one of the tapers that burned upon the table, still set with snowy linen and silver dishes from which they had dined.

He amended the thought. From which Molly had dined. Dined as she, poor lovely creature from some obscure group of actors, had never dined before. He had dined afterwards. She had dined upon food, but he had dined upon life.

He felt replete now. It was a pity he had not been able to restrain his impulse to kill. London was a city of infinite interest

in this, the twentieth century. He should have planned on a prolonged stay, to explore it fully, but temptation had been too great, after so long an abstinence.

He moved swiftly now. The cheap necklace of glass beads, which the girl's mind had seen as rare diamonds, he allowed to remain about the throat where they glistened against the blue marks of strangling fingers. But he took his cloak from a hook and threw it over his shoulders. He retrieved his hat and let himself out of the door without a backward glance for the empty husk that lay upon the rug.

A waiter in red livery was coming down the hall, past the series of closed doors that led to the famous—and infamous—private dining-rooms of Chubb's. Charles stopped him.

'I leave,' he said. 'My friend—' he nodded toward the closed door—'wishes to be undisturbed so that she may compose herself. Please see to it.'

A coin slipped from one hand to the other, and the servitor nodded.

'Very good, Sir,' he said. No titles and no names were used at Chubb's. They were, however, well known to both the proprietor and all the help. A pity.

Charles walked down the long corridor, down the steps which led to the street without imposing upon one the necessity of exposing himself to the view of the crowd in the dining-rooms below. As he let himself out, the eight-foot tall doorman, cloaked in crimson with a black shake upon his head—a sight more goggled at in these days by tourists from puritanical America than even Windsor Castle—raised a hand. A hansom cab arrived in place precisely on the moment that his steps carried him to the kerb.

Without looking back, Charles tossed a coin over his shoulder. The giant doorman casually retrieved it from the air as a dozen beggars and street loungers leaped futilely for it.

'Burchester House,' Charles said to the coachman.

He settled back to stare with hungry eyes upon this, the new London of which he had seen so little—and could have seen so much if he had not let himself be carried away by the soft sweet temptation of Molly Blanchard's life so that. . . .

But it was futile to dwell upon it. There would be other occasions. As they rolled through the dark streets he let himself relive the moment when he had placed the necklace about Molly's throat, telling her to look deep into his eyes. The heady delight of the instant when her trusting eyes had seen behind the mask of

flesh which he now wore. The almost intolerable joy of her struggles.

He realized that the hansom had stopped. For how long had he been living again those delights, unaware? There was not, after all, infinity ahead of him yet. Pursuit would be hot after him soon, and he was as vulnerable now as a new-hatched chick.

He stepped from the cab and flung the driver money. Charles, still with the down of youth upon his pink and white cheeks, strolled with the gait of a man much older and more experienced into the great, three-storied stone mansion which was the London residence of the Burchesters.

Inside, someone came scurrying out of the shadows of the almost dark parlour.

'Charles, my son,' his mother began, in a voice that trembled.

'Later, mother,' he said sharply, and brushed past her. 'I am going to my studio. I will be occupied for some time.' He started up the stairs toward the tower room where he kept his paints and canvases. Behind him he heard his mother whimpering. He paid no heed. As he reached the second floor he increased his pace. It would not do to be late in getting back to his sanctuary.

An hour later, with his mother weeping outside his door and the men from Scotland Yard hammering on it, Charles, Duke of Burchester, flung himself from the casement window and jellied himself on the cobblestones below.

Paris, 1963.

The Musée des Antiquités Historiques was a small brick building, twisted out of shape by the pressure of time and its neighbours. It stood at the end of one of Paris's many obscure streets, so narrow and twisting that no driver of even the smallest car, entering one, could be sure of finding room enough to turn around to get out again.

Beyond the Musée flowed the Seine, and if the waters of the Seine gave off any glint of light this overcast day, the glint was wholly lost in passing through the grime that darkly frosted the windows of the office of the curator, Professor Henri Thibaut.

Thibaut himself was ancient enough to seem one of the museum's exhibits, rather than its curator. But his eyes still snapped, and he spoke with a swift crispness that strained Harry Langham's otherwise excellent understanding of French.

'Cagliostro?' Thibaut said, and the word seemed to uncoil from his lips like a tiny serpent of sound. 'Count Alexander Cagliostro, self-styled. Born in 1743, died in 1795. A man of great controversy.

By some denounced as a fraud. By others acclaimed as a miracle worker—a veritable magician. Ah yes, my young colleague from America, I have studied his life. Your information is entirely correct.'

'Good,' Harry Langham said. He smiled. At thirty-five he still seemed younger than his age, although a carefully acquired professorial manner helped counterbalance his youthful aspect.

'Frankly, sir,' he added, 'I had just about given up hope of getting any decent information about Cagliostro to make my summer in Europe worth while. I'm an associate professor of history at Boston College—my period is the 18th century—and I am working for my doctorate, you see. I have chosen Count Cagliostro as the subject for my thesis. This is my last day in France. Only last night I heard of you—heard that you yourself had once written a thesis on the life of Cagliostro. I'm here, hoping you will assist me.'

'Ah.' Thibaut took a cigarette from an ivory box and lit it. 'And from what viewpoint do you approach your subject? Do you propose to expose him as one of history's great frauds? Or will you credit him with powers bordering on the magical?'

'That's my problem,' Harry Langham said frankly. 'To play it safe I ought to call him a mountebank, a faker, a great charlatan. But I can't. I started thinking that, and now—now I believe that he may really have had mystic powers. His life is wrapped in such mystery—'

'And you wish to clarify the mystery?' Thibaut said, his tone sardonic. 'You will write your thesis about Cagliostro. You will win an advanced degree. You will get a promotion. You will make more salary. You will marry some attractive woman. All from the dusty remains of Cagliostro. N'est-ce pas?'

'Well—yes.' Harry Langham laughed, a bit uneasily. 'Cagliostro—thesis—promotion—money—marriage. Almost like an equation, isn't it?'

'It is indeed.' With a sudden motion, Thibaut ground out his cigarette. 'Except that the answer is wrong.'

'How do you mean?'

'Cagliostro can bring you only grief. Go back to America and erase the name of Cagliostro from your memory!'

'But Professor!' Harry reflected that the French became excited easily, and the thought made his tone amused. 'You yourself wrote a thesis about the man.'

'And destroyed it.' Thibaut sank back into his chair. 'Some things our world will not accept. The truth about Count Cagliostro is one of them.'

'But he's been dead for nearly two hundred years!'

'M'sieu Langham,' Thibaut said, reaching again for the cigarettes

in the ivory box, 'Evil never dies. No, no. Do not answer. There is little I can do to help you. I destroyed my thesis and all my notes. However, if you should go to London—'

'I go there tomorrow,' Harry told him. 'I sail from Southampton in a week. I hope to find some material on Cagliostro in the British Museum.'

'You will find little of value,' the Frenchman said. 'To the British, Cagliostro was a charlatan. But attend. Seek in the old furniture shops for a plain desk with a hinged lid, the letter 'C' carved into it in ornate scrolls. Once it belonged to Cagliostro. Later it was acquired by one of the Dukes of Burchester. I have reason to believe that certain of Cagliostro's papers were hidden in a secret drawer in this desk and may possibly still be there.'

'A plain desk with a hinged lid, the letter "C" carved into it.' Harry Langham's expression was eager. 'That would be a find indeed. I certainly thank you, Professor Thibaut.'

The older man eyed him sadly.

'I still repeat my advice—tear up your thesis, forget the name. But you are young, you will not do it. Very well, I shall make one more suggestion. 'Go—now, today—to the Church of St. Martin.'

'St. Martin?'

'I will give you the address. Find the caretaker, give him ten new francs. Tell him you wish to see the tomb of Yvette Dulaine.'

'Yvette Dulaine?'

'She was buried there in 1780.'

'But I don't understand—I mean, what point is there in seeing the tomb of a girl who died in 1780?'

'I said she was buried then.' Thibaut's gaze was inscrutable. 'Insist that the caretaker open the tomb for you. Then do whatever you must do. Au revoir, my young friend.'

In the age-wracked Museum of Historic Antiquities, it had been easy to smile at the melodramatic earnestness of the French. Here, with the streets of Paris Lord alone knew how many feet above his head, moving down a narrow stone passageway slippery with seepage of water, holding aloft his own candle and following the flickering flame borne by the rheumatic old man in front of him, Harry found it less easy to smile.

They had gone down endless steps, along corridors that turned a dozen times. How old was this church anyway, and how far into the bowels of the earth did its subterranean crypts go? The whole thing was too much like an old movie for Harry Langham's taste. Except that the smell of damp corruption in the

air, the shuffle of the old man's shoes on the rock flooring, and the scamper of rats in the darkness carried their own conviction.

They passed another room opening off the corridor, a room into which the bobbing candle flames sent just enough light to show old, elaborately carved stone tombs in close-joined ranks.

'Is this it?' Harry asked impatiently, as his guide paused. 'We must be there by now. We have had time enough to travel half-way across Paris.'

'Patience, my son.' The caretaker's tone was unhurried. 'Those who lie here cannot come to us. We must go to them.'

'Then let's hurry it up. This is my last day in Paris. I have a thousand things to tend to.'

They went on, around another turning, down some stairs and came into a low-ceilinged room dug from solid rock. The tombs here were simpler. Many had only a name and a date. In the light from the two candles, they lay like sleeping monsters of stone, jealously hiding within them the bones of the humans they had swallowed.

'Are we there at last?' Harry Langham's tone was ironic. 'Thank heaven for that! Now which of these dandy little one-room apartments belongs to Miss Yvette Dulaine? I've come this far. I'll see it, but then I'm heading back for fresh air.'

'None of these,' the caretaker said quietly. 'She lies over here, *la pauvre petite*. Come.'

He skirted the outer row of tombs and paused, lifting his candle high. In a crude niche in the stone a tomb apart from the others had been placed. It could have been no plainer—stone sides, a stone slab on top, the date 1780 cut into the top, no other inscription.

'She is here. It is only the second time in this century that she has been disturbed.'

Harry stared sceptically at the simple tomb. His shoes were damp and he felt chilled as well as somehow disappointed.

'Well?' he asked. 'What am I supposed to do? Say ooh and aah? Why isn't her name on it—just the date? How do I know this is even Yvette Dulaine's tomb?'

The caretaker straightened painfully. He held his candle up and stared into Harry's face.

'You are American,' he said. 'When this tomb was closed, your nation had but begun its destiny. You have much to learn.'

'Look,' Harry said, controlling his impatience with an effort. 'I agree we have a lot to learn. But I can't see I'm learning much here, looking at some chunks of stone that hide a lady who died one hundred and eighty-odd years ago.'

'Ah.' The other spoke gently. 'If she had but died.'

'If she had but—' Harry stared at him. 'What are you talking about? They don't bury you unless you're dead. Believe me, I know.'

'M'sieu's knowledge is no doubt formidable.' The other's tone was gentle, the sarcasm in his words. 'Let us now disturb the peace of Mlle Dulaine for but one moment more. We shall open her tomb.'

'Now really, that's hardly necessary—' Harry began, but stopped when the caretaker handed him his candle and grasped the bottom end of the slab top. He tugged; inch by inch the heavy stone moved, screeching its protest. Harry had no special desire to see some mouldering bones. He had avoided such a tourist attraction as the catacombs of Paris, just because he didn't care for morbid reminders of man's mortality. He liked his life—and death—in the pages of books. Both life and death were neat and tidy there and could be studied without emotion. He did not look into the open tomb until the caretaker straightened and motioned with his hand.

'Perceive,' he said. 'Look well upon the contents of this tomb, which the good fathers left nameless so that the poor one inside would not disturb the thoughts of the living.'

Still holding the candles, Harry bent over. As he did so, the flames flickered wildly, as if buffeted by drafts from all sides, though no breath of air stirred there. And the shadows they created made the girl in the tomb seem to smile, as if she would open her eyes and speak.

Her face was madonna-like in its perfection of ivory beauty. Heavy black tresses, unbound, flowed down upon her breast. Her hands, small and exquisite, were crossed upon her bosom. She wore something white and simple which exposed her wrists and arms. As he bent over her Harry's hand shook and one of the candles dropped a blob of molten wax upon her wrist. He so completely expected her to move, to cry out at the pain, that when she did not he felt a sudden wild rage. At her, for seeming so 'alive, so beautiful and so desirable. At Thibaut for sending him here on a fool's errand. At the shrivelled gnome of a caretaker for wasting his time on so childish a deception.

'Damn you!' he cried. 'She's a wax figure! What kind of tomfoolery is this?'

With surprising strength, the caretaker thrust the stone lid back into place. Harry had one last glimpse of the young and lovely face with the lips that seemed about to speak, and then it was gone. And he could not explain why he felt doubly cheated, doubly angered.

'So!' he shouted. 'You didn't want me to get another look! You knew I was going to touch her and see that she really was wax. Admit it and tell me why you bothered with this nonsense. Or is this a standard tourist attraction that you've rigged up to bring in a little income from gullible Americans?'

The Frenchman faced him with dignity, reaching for and taking back his candle.

'M'sieu,' he said. 'As I remarked, you are young, you have much to learn. Once, Mlle Dulaine attracted the attention of a certain Count Cagliostro. She refused him. He persisted. She rejected him utterly. One night she vanished from her home. The next day, servants of Count Cagliostro found her lying in his rooms, at the base of a great mirror as if she had been admiring herself. The Count was held blameless; he was far from Paris at the time.

'Mlle Dulaine seemed asleep, but did not waken. There was no mark on her. Yet she did not breathe and her heart did not beat. A week passed. A month. She remained unchanged. She did not begin that return to dust which is the fate of us all. So her sorrowing parents consigned her to the good fathers of the church, and they placed her here. She has remained as you see her, since the year 1780.'

'That's idiotic,' Harry said, shakily. 'Such things aren't possible. She's a wax figure. She's certainly not dead.'

'No, m'sieu. She is not dead. Yet she is not alive. She exists in some dark dimension it is not well to think of. The Count Cagliostro took his revenge upon her. She will sleep thus, until the very stones of Paris become dust around her. Now let us go. As you reminded me, you have many things to do.'

'Wait a minute. I want to see that girl—that figure—again.'

Harry's breathing was harsh in the silence; he felt his pulse pounding—with fury? with bafflement?—he couldn't tell what emotion he felt. But the caretaker was already moving toward the stairs.

In a moment he would be gone. Harry wanted to tear the stone slab off that tomb and satisfy himself. But to linger even a moment would mean to be lost in those Stygian depths without a guide.

Furious, he followed the flickering candle that was already becoming small in the darkness.

It was easy, in the daylight above, to regain his composure and laugh at himself for being tricked. It was easy, next day in London, when he met Bart Phillips, his closest friend at the university, who had spent the summer in London working toward

his doctorate in chemistry, to entertain him with an elaborate account of the mummery he had gone through. It was easy to erase the lingering doubt that the girl had indeed been a wax figure.

Easy—until he found the mirror.

He found it in a dingy second-hand shop in Soho, called Bob's Odds and Ends. The desk he was seeking he had traced to an auction house which had suffered a fire. Presumably the desk had burned with many other rare pieces. But Bob's Odds and Ends had been mentioned in connection with the sale of the furnishings of Burchester House, residence of a ducal line now extinct.

Bob himself, five feet tall and four feet around the waist, did not bother to remove the toothpick from between his unusually bad teeth when Harry, with Bart in protesting tow, asked about the desk.

'No, guv'nor,' the untidy fat man said. 'No such article 'ere. Probably Murchison's got it, them wot 'ad the fire.'

'Come on, Harry,' Bart said. 'One last day in London and still you're dragging me to junk shops. Let's go get something to drink and see if we can't make a date with those girls from Charlestown we met.'

'Don't 'urry off, gents,' Bob said plaintively, unhooking fat thumbs from a greasy vest. 'Got somethin' pretty near as good. 'Ow would you like to buy th' mirror wot killed th' Duke of Burchester 'imself?'

'Mirror?' Harry asked, the word tugging at his memory.

'Come on, Harry!' Bart exploded, but Harry was already following the fat man toward the dark recesses of the shop.

The mirror was a tall, oval pier glass, hinged so that it could be adjusted. It stood in a corner. As the fat man swung it out, it rolled on a sloping stretch of floor, toppled sideways, and would have crashed down upon him if he had not sidestepped nimbly. The mirror fell to the floor with a violence that should have sent flying glass for a dozen feet.

The proprietor looked at it calmly, then heaved it upright.

'That's 'ow it killed th' duke,' he observed. 'Fell on 'im. And 'im with an 'atchet in his 'and, like he was trying to smash it. But this glass can't smash. Unbreakable, it is.'

'What's unbreakable?' Bart asked, following them.

'This mirror, according to the man,' Harry said.

'Nonsense. Glass can't be made unbreakable,' Bart said. 'Good Lord, it's all painted over with black paint. It's no earthly use to anyone. Come on, I'm dying of thirst.'

'But, gents, it's a rare mirror, it is,' the fat man said sadly. 'With-

out that paint, it'd be worth a pretty sum. Besides, it's an 'aunted mirror. It killed th' duke 'isself, and it stood in a closet for almost fifty years before that. Ever since th' duke's brother, wot was th' duke then, murdered a girl in Chubb's Restaurant back in 1910, then jumped out th' window into th' courtyard an' broke his neck when the bobbies came for 'im.'

'Come on, Harry,' Bart groaned. But Harry, on the verge of turning away, saw the faint glint of glass near the bottom where something sharp had scratched a few square inches of the black paint which covered the mirror's surface. It seemed to him the bit of glass reflected light, and he stooped to look into it.

He stared for a long minute, until Bart became alarmed and grabbed him by the shoulder.

'Harry!' he said. 'My God, man, you're the colour of putty. Are you sick?'

Harry Langham looked at him without seeing him.

'Bart,' he said, 'Bart—I saw a face in that mirror.'

'Of course you did. Your own.'

'No. I saw the face of that girl, Yvette Dulaine, who lies beneath St. Martin's Church in Paris. She was holding a candle, and looking out at me, and she tried to speak to me. I could read her lips. She said, "Sauvez-moi!" Save me!'

'What in God's name has happened to Harry Langham?' Bart Phillips demanded, and ran his fingers through bristling red hair. 'He's missed his classes two days in a row. Mrs. Graham, is he sick?'

The middle-aged woman, who might have stepped from one of the stiff portraits on the walls of the rundown Beacon Street house, compressed her lips.

'I don't know what has happened to him, Professor Phillips,' she said. 'He hasn't been himself for a week, not since he received word that mirror was due to be landed. Then since they delivered it two days ago he has not left his room. He makes me leave his meals outside the door. I have always considered Professor Langham a very fine lodger, but if this goes on—Well!'

She uttered the final exclamation to Bart Phillips's back as he took the broad, curving stairs of the once elegant house two at a time.

At the top, Bart hesitated outside Harry's door. Some dirty dishes sat on the floor just beside it. He tested the knob, found the door unlocked, and quietly pushed it open.

In the centre of the big, old-fashioned room, Harry was on his knees before the oval pier glass, laboriously scraping away at the black paint which covered its surface. From time to time he

paused to wet a rag in turpentine, rub down the surface he had scraped, and then begin again.

The younger man walked quietly up behind him. The glass, he saw, was now nearly free of obscuring paint. It shone with an unusual clarity, giving the effect of a great depth. Then Harry saw his reflection and leaped up.

'Bart!' he shouted. 'What are you doing here? Why have you broken into my room?'

'Easy, boy, easy,' Bart said, putting a hand on his shoulder. 'What's the matter, are you in training for a nervous breakdown? I've been coming in your room without knocking for years.'

'Yes—yes, of course.'

Harry Langham rubbed his forehead wearily. 'Sorry, Bart, I'm edgy. Not enough sleep, I guess.'

Bart looked at the flecks of paint on the floor, and rapped the mirror with his knuckle. Harry started to protest, and subsided.

'At a guess,' Bart said, 'you have been working on this old looking-glass since it got here. Now honestly, Harry, aren't you being—well, illogical? I mean, you think you saw a girl's face mysteriously looking out at you from this mirror, back in London. You've been on pins and needles ever since waiting for it to arrive—you've hardly been over to see us, and I must say that Sis is hurt, since she kind of got the idea you planned to propose. Tell me the truth—are you expecting that girl is going to appear in this mirror again? Is that what you've had all along in the back of your mind?'

'I don't know.' Harry dropped into a chair and stared at himself in the mirror. 'I tell you, Bart—I just don't know. I feel I *have* to get this mirror clean again. Then—well, I don't know what. But I have to get it clean.'

'In other words, a neurotic compulsion,' Bart told him. 'Under an old church in Paris you saw a wax figure. Later your imagination played a trick on you—'

'It wasn't imagination!' Harry Langham leaped to his feet with a fury that astonished them both. 'I saw her. I tell you I saw her!'

He stopped, breathing harshly. His friend had fallen back a step in surprise.

'I—I'm sorry, Bart. Look, maybe I am being — unreasonable. Just let me get this mirror cleaned, and some sleep, and I'll be myself. And I'll come to dinner tomorrow night with you and Laura. How's that?'

'Well—all right,' Bart said. 'And you'll go to your classes Monday? I officially announced you had a virus, but I can't cover for you any more.'

'I'll be at my classes. And thanks, Bart.'

When Bart had left, Harry dropped into the chair again and stared at the gleaming mirror. It seemed to shine with a light which was not reflection, yet he could discover no source for it.

'Yvette!' he said. 'Yvette? Are you there? If you are—show yourself.'

He knew he was acting ridiculously. Yet he did not care. He wanted to see her face again—the face he had seen in a tomb in Paris, the face he had seen in a bit of mirror in London, the face he saw in his dreams now.

Nothing happened. After a long moment, he got to work again with scraper, turpentine and steel wool.

The paint stuck doggedly. Twilight had dimmed the room to semi-darkness by the time the glass finally showed no trace of black remaining.

Exhausted, Harry sank back into his chair and stared at it. It was curious how brilliant a reflection it gave. Even in the twilight it showed every detail of his room. His studio couch, his bookshelves, his pictures, his hi-fi set—they seemed three dimensional.

He sighed with fatigue and his vision blurred. The reflection in the mirror clouded like wind-rippled water. He rubbed his eyes and once again the image was clear. The handsome black-and-white striped wallpaper, the crystal chandelier for candles, the old rosewood harpsichord, the enormous Oriental rug on the floor, the hunting-scene tapestry on one wall—

Harry Langham sat up abruptly. The room in the mirror was a place he had never seen in his life. It bore no more resemblance to his own room than—than—

And then she entered.

She wore something simple—he had never had an eye for clothes, he only knew it was elegant and expensive and of a style two centuries old. Her black hair was bound up in coiled tiers. She carried a candle, and as she came towards him from one of the doorways that showed in the shadowy sides of the room, she paused to light the candelabra atop the harpsichord. Then she turned towards the man who was watching, his breathing quick and shallow, his pulse hammering. It was she. Yvette Dulaine, whose body lay buried beneath St. Martin's Church.

He thought she was going to step into the room with him. But she stopped as if at an invisible barrier, and gave him a glance of infinite beseechment. Her lips moved. He could hear no sound, but he could read the words.

'Sauvez moi! M'sieu, je vous implore. Sauvez-moi!'

'How?' he cried. 'Tell me how—'

She made a gesture of helpless distress. A ripple swept across the mirror and she was gone. Harry Langham sprang to his feet.

'Come back!' he shouted. 'Yvette, come back!'

Behind him the door opened. He turned in a fury, to see Mrs. Graham bearing a tray of food.

'What are you doing?' he shouted at her. 'Why did you break in? You sent her away! You frightened her!'

The woman drew herself up in starchy dignity.

'I am not accustomed to being spoken to that way, Professor Langham,' she said. 'I knocked, and heard you say "Come." I have brought your dinner. I would prefer that you arrange to lodge elsewhere as soon as this month is up.'

She set down the tray and marched like a grenadier out of the room.

Harry passed a hand hopelessly over his forehead. The sight of the food on the tray revolted him. He thrust it away and turned back to the mirror, which now was dull and lifeless in the almost darkened room.

'Yvette,' he whispered. 'Please! Please come back. Tell me how I can help you.'

The mirror did not change. He flung himself into the chair and stared at it as if the very intensity of his willing would make it light again, would reveal the strange and elegant room it had shown before. The room darkened, until he could no longer see the mirror. Then his fingers, gripping the arms of the chair, relaxed. Exhaustion overcame his willpower, and he slept.

It was the booming of a clock that woke him. Or was it a voice, speaking insistently in his ear? Or a sound as of a thousand tinkling chimes intermingled? Or all three? He opened his eyes, and saw before him the mirror, light emanating from it. Once again it showed the strange room. The candles in the crystal chandelier glittered. And an elegantly dressed gentleman, who leaned against the harpsichord and watched, smiled.

'You are awake, m'sieu,' he said, and now Harry heard the words clearly. 'That is good. I have been waiting to speak to you.'

Harry Langham rubbed his eyes, and sat up.

'Who are you?' he asked. 'Where is she? Yvette, I mean.'

'I am Count Lafontaine, at your service.' The man bowed. 'And Mademoiselle Dulaine will be here. She is waiting for you to join us. To save us.'

'Save you?'

'We are both victims of an evil done long ago, before even your

great-grandfather was born. The evil of the most evil of living men, Count Alexander Cagliostro. But with your help, that evil can be undone.'

'How?' Harry demanded.

'In a moment I shall tell you. But here comes Mlle Dulaine. Will you not join us?'

Harry rose to his feet, feeling strangely light, disembodied.

'Join you?' he asked. And even as he spoke he was aware that his senses were dulled, his mind sleepy. 'Is it possible?'

'Just step forward.' The Count held out his hand. 'I will assist you.'

Beyond the man, Harry saw the girl come slowly into the room. She came toward him, slowly, on her face a look of infinite appeal.

'Yvette!' he cried. 'Yvette!' He took two steps forward, and felt his hand grasped by the cold, inhuman fingers of the man within the mirror. The pull but assisted his unthinking impulse. For a moment he felt like a swimmer breasting icy water, shoulder deep. Then the sensation was gone and he was within the room in the mirror.

He looked with exultation into the eyes of the girl.

'Yvette!' he said. 'I'm here. I'm here to save you.'

'Alas, m'sieu,' she said. 'Now you too have been trapped. Look.'

He turned. The Count Lafontaine bowed to him, formally.

'A thousand thanks, my young friend,' he said. 'It is half a century since last I left the world of the mirror. I am hungry for the taste of life again—very hungry.'

He kissed the tips of his fingers and flung the kiss to them.

'Adieu, mes enfants,' he said. 'Console each other in my absence.'

He strode confidently forward, and beyond him Harry saw, as through a window, his own room, dimly lit. The Frenchman stepped into the room and approached the chair where Harry had been seated, and now the shadowed figure in the chair, which he had not noticed before, was suddenly clear and vivid.

'That's me!' he gasped. 'Yvette—that's me—asleep in the chair.'

She stood beside him, her coiled dark hair coming to his shoulders, and infinite regret tinged her voice.

'Your body, M'sieu Langham. *You* are here, in the world of the mirror, this dark dimension which is not life and is not death and yet partakes of both. In your sleep he spoke the words of his spell and evoked your spirit forth from your body without your awareness. Now he will inhabit your body—for an hour, a day, a decade, I do not know.'

'He?' Harry shook his head, fighting the sense of languor and oppression. 'But who is he? He said—'

'He is the Count Alexander Cagliostro, m'sieu. And see—he lives again, in your body.'

As they spoke, the figure that had emerged from the mirror world turned to smile at them with sardonic triumph. Then it settled down upon Harry's sleeping body, blended with it, vanished—and Harry saw himself rise, stretch and yawn and smile.

'Ah, it's good to be alive again, with a young body, a strong body.' It was his voice speaking and in English—his voice subtly accented.

'Now, au revoir. The night is still young.'

'No!' Harry flung himself forward—and was stopped by an impalpable barrier. The glass of the mirror—yet it did not feel like glass. It felt like an icy net which for an instant yielded, then gathered resistance and threw him back. 'You can't!' he cried. 'Come back!'

'But I can,' said Count Cagliostro reasonably, in Harry's own voice. 'And I shall come back when it pleases me. Meanwhile, it is best that none save myself should be able to see you.'

He raised his hand in the air and drew it downward, speaking a dozen words in rolling Latin. And Harry faced only darkness—an empty darkness that stretched beyond him, for an infinitude of time and space.

He lunged into it, and found himself spinning dizzily in a black void where there was neither substance nor direction. There was only a cube of light, from the mirror room, swiftly dwindling into a tiny gleam.

'Come back! You will be lost forever, m'sieu. I pray you, return!'

The words, faint and faraway, steadied his whirling senses. He saw the light, focused his thoughts on the room it represented, on the girl, and once more he stood beside her, with the candles flickering warmly above them and the hungry blackness behind him.

'Mon Dieu, I feared you were gone!' Her voice was unsteady. 'M'sieu, we are alone here together. Even the consolation of death and the sweet sleep of eternity is denied us. At least, let us keep each other company and take what comfort we may from that.'

'Yes, you're right.' Harry passed a trembling hand over his face. 'And maybe we'd better start with you telling me what in God's name has happened to us.'

It did not require many words, Harry thought dully, half stretched out upon a tapestried couch as he listened to the soft

tone of Yvette's voice. She had rejected Cagliostro—and with a smile he had promised her that she would have all eternity in which to regret her decision. Then one night in her sleep a strange compulsion had taken her will, and she had gone to his home, admitted herself, and gone up to his empty room—to find him smiling at her from within the mirror. He had spoken—She had left her body behind crumpled on the floor—and she had joined him in the world of the mirror. Then he—his own body many miles away—had left her alone there until the time came for him to take final refuge himself in the world between life and death of which the mirror was a door that he had opened.

'But he died in 1795 in prison,' Harry protested.

'No, m'sieu. They but said he had died. His body is buried somewhere, as is mine, and like mine, it does not change. His spirit sought refuge here, in this sanctuary he planned long in advance. And from time to time he found means to escape, as he has now, in your body. Over the years, the crimes committed by various hands, yet all animated by the spirit of Cagliostro, would fill a library of horrors. One has heard of the Marquis de Sade. Yet the Marquis was but a man interested in things magical—until he encountered the mirror and met the gaze of Cagliostro. Then, m'sieu, the name of de Sade became synonymous with evil.

'Later, given but little choice, he assumed the flesh of a drunken servant who had entrée only to the lowest of London's dives. It was then he acquired a nickname which you will know. Jacques.'

'Jacques?'

'Jacques, the Ripper. Never was he caught, this Jacques. He froze to death in a gutter one winter night—but only after the spirit of Cagliostro had safely quitted his mortal flesh.

'And then young Charles, Duke of Burchester, acquired a desk and the mirror for his studio. And so fell into Cagliostro's power. But the evil Count was too greedy. The first night he killed a girl almost in public and must flee back to this, his place of safety. Charles, himself again, tried to break the mirror. When he could not, when the men of the police came for him, he covered the mirror with black paint, and then he threw himself from his window and was dashed to death on the stones below.

'Now, m'sieu—' her gaze was compassionate—'he is free again in your body. And the hunger is strong within him. I would speak words of consolation, but unfortunately I cannot.'

'But what is he doing?' Harry started to his feet. 'My God, Yvette, isn't there any way to know what he is up to and to stop him?'

'It is possible to know what he is doing,' she said at last, 'for the spirit still is connected with the body, though but faintly. But he cannot be stopped. He is the master, we are his prisoners. And it is not wise to know what your body does at his orders.'

'I must know, I have to know!' Harry declared feverishly.

'Then lie back, stare at the burning candles, and let your mind empty itself. . . .'

He was in a bar somewhere. A crowded, noisy, smoky dive. Impression of laughter, of voices. Of a face looking up into his. A hungry face, over-painted, yet still with some youthful sweetness in it not quite destroyed. They were moving. They were outdoors. They were strolling down a narrow street toward the waterfront, and light and sound here left behind.

The girl was petulant. She did not want to go. But he laughed, and with a hand on her elbow, urged her onward. They came to a railing, with the dark water swirling below, and a mist curling around them.

'No, I'll show you what I promised you,' he was saying. 'But first we must remove these.'

He deftly removed from her ears the cheap, dangling crystal earrings, dropped them into his pocket.

'Why did you do that?' Her voice was shrill, angry. 'You can't treat me like that.'

'Your beauty should be unadorned. Look into my eyes.'

She looked and her gaze grew fixed. In his eyes she saw the black void of eternity, and rising from it the grinning skull-face of Death. She did not struggle, did not scream as his hungry fingers closed around her throat. Only when it was too late did she fight, so deliciously, so rewardingly. When he dropped her over into the rolling waters below and saw them suck her down with hungry swiftness, he felt again deliciously warm and full. . . .

'M'sieu! M'sieu!'

He opened his eyes. Yvette was shaking him, her face concerned.

'M'sieu, you looked so distressed! I told you it was not wise—'

'I'm a murderer,' Harry groaned. 'I killed her—killed that girl for the sheer lust of killing. . . .'

'Comfort yourself, m'sieu. You did not. It was he, Cagliostro, slaking his hunger for life. It is thus his spirit feeds, grows strong—on the life of those he sacrifices.'

'But it was my hands that choked her—Oh, my God, what are we going to do?'

He stood up, his hands clenched. 'Can't we do *anything*?' .

'Nothing, alas. He lives—in your body. We are shadows of the spirit trapped between life and death. Someday he will return and you will once more regain your body—'

'To be accused of all the infamous crimes he committed!' Harry cried. 'To pay for them. But first, I'll break this mirror. That's one thing I won't fail to do.'

Her gaze was wistful.

'If only that could be. Then I could at last die and be at rest. But you will not do what you think. Others have tried and failed. This mirror cannot be broken by human hand—only he himself, Cagliostro, can break it. No—do not ask. I cannot answer how or why these things are. He has the knowledge. I have not. Now, you must distract yourself. Come—let me show you this world.'

He let her take his hand, and numbly followed as she led.

There were doorways to the great room, several of them. She led him through one and he found himself in a small, book-lined library, where alchemical apparatus crowded tables, and a small, white-globed lamp burned with a bright fierceness. A book lay open, revealing mystic symbols. A giant spider squatted upon it and stared at them with glistening pinpoint eyes.

'His library,' Yvette said. 'Once the mirror stood in this room in the world of reality. Everything in the mirror reflected since it was made exists in this dark and fathomless dimension, if only it was reflected long enough; and his arts can call it into being.'

'Like a time exposure being developed,' Harry muttered to himself.

'Pardon?'

'I was just thinking. What lies beyond?'

'There are many rooms and a garden and even a pond. I will show you.'

There were indeed other rooms, but Harry viewed them without interest. There was a garden where fruit trees bloomed, and a pool that reflected the sunlight of a sun not seen for two centuries. But when he would have gone on, through other doors, Yvette held him back.

'No, m'sieu. Beyond there is nothing. Darkness. Emptiness. Where one can become lost and wander until the end of time. And in the darkness there are—creatures.'

She shivered as she spoke the word. But Harry persisted in his exploration. He opened a closed door—and there beyond it did indeed lie abysmal darkness. There were sounds in the darkness... flutings and wailings like no sounds he had ever heard before. And something darker than darkness itself drifted past as

they watched, accompanied by the sound of a myriad of tiny bells. Swiftly Yvette slammed the door.

'Please, m'sieu,' she panted. 'Promise me. Never go into the darkness. Even Cagliostro knows not what it is or what creatures inhabit it.'

'All right, Yvette,' Harry agreed. 'I promise. Let's go back. Maybe Cagliostro has returned. Maybe he'll be ready to give up my body now.'

They returned through rooms of a dozen different sorts, one of them plainly the cabin of a ship. In the room of the mirror, the candles still burned as they had before, unconsumed and eternal. The wall of blackness which was the mirror remained in place. But even as they entered it, it dissolved, became a window beyond which was Harry's study where Cagliostro sat at a table, eating breakfast and reading a newspaper.

He smiled smugly at them.

'I hope you have become well acquainted, mes enfants. I have waited for your return. M'sieu Langham, this body you have loaned me is a splendid one, so strong, so handsome, so indefatigable. I shall enjoy its use for a long time, I think. This time I make no foolish mistakes. I have begged the most humble pardon of Mrs. Graham, your good landlady, and she has forgiven me. This evening I dine with your friend, Bart, and his sister Laura, with whom I gather you have—what is the word?—an understanding. I must make amends to them for your behaviour.

'Ah, my good friend, this Boston of yours is a most interesting city. Cold and reserved in appearance, yet it has its undercurrent of wickedness quite as naughty as London or Paris. I enjoyed myself last night. I was rash, perhaps, but fortunately I escaped detection. And now my motto is to be—discretion.'

He rose and tossed down his napkin.

'Now, I shall rest,' he said, and yawned. 'Last night was—fatiguing. Tonight may be the same. Au 'voir.'

He swept his hand downward with a roll of unknown words, and blackness sprang into place.

Wretchedly, Harry turned to the girl.

'How long were we?' he asked. 'A dozen hours have passed since last night, but it seemed like only a few minutes—half an hour, perhaps.'

'There is no time here,' Yvette told him. 'An hour may seem a day, a day an hour. You will become used to it, M'sieu Harry. Compose yourself—think not of Cagliostro.'

She seated herself at the harpsichord and begun to play a light, tinkling tune to which she sang in a sweet soprano. Harry flung

himself down on the tapestried couch and listened. Gradually he relaxed. His mind ceased to throb and burn with turbulent thoughts. But as it did, other images, other sounds and sensations entered it.

Voices. Bart and Laura. Laughter. Wine.

'It's good to see you acting normal again, Harry. You had us worried.'

'I don't wonder, old man. That mirror delusion—you brought me to my senses. Guess I worked too hard in Paris.'

'Then there wasn't any girl in the mirror?' Laura's voice. Laura's smile. Laura's hand lightly on his arm as her eyes begged for assurance.

'If there was, she looked like me and needed a shave.' Laughter. 'Besides, what good would a girl in a mirror be?' More laughter. 'You'll see for yourself. When we set up house-keeping.'

'Goodness. Is that a proposal? Or a proposition?' Wide, hopeful eyes, lips that hide a trembling eagerness.

'Look, you two—while you debate the question, I have to see a graduate student of mine who's working on an interesting line of experiment.' Bart, rising, leaving. 'I won't be back until late.'

'Tactful Bart.'

'A nice brother. I like him. Harry—'

'Yes?'

'Whether it was a proposal or a proposition, it's a little sudden. Since you got back from Europe, I've hardly seen you. Why, I think you've kissed me once.'

'An oversight I plead guilty to. I can only say I'm prepared to make amends. Like this.'

Warm lips. Tremulous response becoming breathless excitement.

'Harry! What *kind* of overwork did you do in Paris? What research were you engaged in, anyway?'

'Can not we go elsewhere? . . . This is better. My dear . . .'

Breathless excitement becoming recklessness.

'Harry! You mustn't!'

'Oh, yes, my dear I must.'

'And I thought you were so prim and proper—even though I liked you.'

'And I thought you the same. How wrong we can be about people! Now. . . .'

'Stop!' Harry leaped to his feet, pressing his fists to his forehead, shutting out the damnable sensations from his distant body.

'M'sieu Harry.' Yvette rose and came to him. Gently she touched

his forehead. 'It is Cagliostro again. You must not try to know what it is he does.'

'I can't help it.' Harry groaned. 'My God, I never thought that Laura—'

'Do not speak of it. Shall I read to you? Shall we walk in the garden?'

'No, no . . . Yvette.'

'Yes?'

'Cagliostro controls whether or not we can see the world outside the mirror—and whether it can see us.'

'That is true. He has charms that control it. If he speaks but the words, we can see and be seen but not heard. Or hear, but not be seen. And the greatest charm, that of drawing the spirit from the body and transporting it within the mirror. Alas, m'sieu, I crave your pardon.'

'For what?'

'It was I—I who enticed you here. I could not help myself. Cagliostro worked magic that brought you to that shop in London where the mirror lay—he had waited long for the right moment. It was he who enabled you to see me. It was his doing that you determined you must own the mirror, must see me.'

'I did feel—possessed,' Harry admitted. 'But don't blame yourself, Yvette. Even without Cagliostro you would have attracted me.'

'You are gallant. I thank you.'

'But what I started to say, if Cagliostro has charms, we can learn. We are not entirely helpless.'

'Learn them? It is true, his books, his philtres, his mystic objects are within his study—'

But in the study, where the white-globed lamp burned with an undying brilliance, Harry groaned and pushed away the strange books, the ancient parchments, after he had leafed through them.

'I can't read them. They're not Latin. Maybe Sanskrit. Maybe Sumerian. Maybe some language that died before history began.'

'It is true,' the girl told him, 'Cagliostro has said that his magic is older than history, that it comes from a race so ancient no trace is left.'

'And I don't believe in magic. That's one trouble. I belong to the twentieth century. Even here—even a victim of it—I still can't believe in magic!'

'Oui,' Yvette agreed, 'belief is necessary. Without belief, the magic does not work. But then one must have faith in God, as well as in evil, m'sieu.'

'Yes, of course!' His eyes lighted. 'And what is magic to one age

is mere science to another. So why shouldn't science to one age be, magic to another? Yvette, help me work this out.'

'Anything I can do, anything,' she said. 'Sometimes Cagliostro had me help him. He said that in things mystic the female principal helps. Wait.'

She took pins from her hair, let her tresses tumble down over her shoulder. From a drawer beneath the bookselves she withdrew an odious object—the dried and shrunken head of a man who once had had flaming red hair and a red beard. She sat facing him, the head upon her lap.

'Now, m'sieu,' she said. 'This head—Cagliostro swore it was the head of one of the thieves crucified with the true Christ. Perhaps. But now I look like a sorceress. I will sit in silence, and you shall study.'

'Good girl!' He plunged anew into an effort to make sense of the books, the cabbalistic symbols. In his mind he thought of them as simply equations which produced certain results. So categorized, he was able to believe in them. After all, this mirror world—was it so much more than a photograph caught on celluloid, or a motion picture electronically impressed upon magnetic tape? Perhaps the people in pictures felt and thought!

And wasn't it Asimov, right here in Boston, who had said that some day the entire personality of a man could be put on tape, to remain forever, to be reproduced again whenever and as often as desired? What would existence inside a magnetized tape be? What thoughts would the man there think?

Perhaps his analogies were faulty, but they helped give him confidence. Yvette sat in silence as he worked, with feverish intensity. He deciphered a word, a sentence, for Cagliostro had translated into a doggerel of Italian, French and Latin the older, unknown language—which might, after all, be the scientific language of a long dead race.

As Yvette had said, there was no time in this place. At intervals he paused and put his fingers to throbbing temples. Then he was aware of sensations from the world of life. His classrooms. Students listening with rapt intensity they had never paid before. Himself speaking with brilliant detail of life in London, in Paris, in the eighteenth century. A girl in the back row, blonde, with a face as soft as a camelia. A girl who paused after class at his request.

'Miss Lee, you are very silent. Yet I think you are hiding a genuine intelligence. Are you afraid of me?'

'Afraid of you? Oh professor, I couldn't ever be that.'

'You need confidence. You need—awareness. I would like to talk to you about yourself. Tonight?'

'Why—why, yes, professor.'

. . . Night. His car. Driving. Lights. Stopping.

'Professor. What—what are you doing?'

'Look into my eyes, child. You are not afraid of me?'

'I—I—no, I trust you. I trust you forever and always.'

'That is good. Now come.'

He forced his thoughts back to the books before him. He translated, worked out probable sequences, guessed where he had to. Still the awareness crept into his mind whenever he relaxed.

'Harry—I haven't seen you for so long.'

'Working on my new thesis, Laura. That fraud Cagliostro—I've torn him up. The new one is to be a comparison of social life in London and Paris in the eighteenth century.'

'It sounds quite exciting.'

'It will be masterly. But I must make up for my neglect. My darling—'

'Harry! But—'

'No buts. Did you know that among the Romans—'

Doggedly he resumed work. But the outside impressions pressed in more strongly.

An alley. Blare of music. A girl, provocative in a red dress. She smiled into his eyes. . . . And lay cold, moments later, in a shadowed corner. . . . Another girl. Walking home from a bus. A scream. A struggle, sweet in its intensity. . . .

'No,' he groaned. 'No, Yvette! The things he is doing! The things I am doing! Even if I conquer him—I can't live. Not with what I have done.'

'Poor M'sieu Harry,' she said. 'But can you conquer him? Suppose you force him to return here and give back your body, what then? This mirror—it too is under a spell. It can be broken only by Cagliostro.'

'Maybe,' Harry said grimly. 'But it hasn't been tested in an atomic explosion. In any case I'm pretty sure that, bathed in hydrofluoric acid, it would dissolve. Or dropped into molten glass it too would melt.'

'But then—' Horror touched her features. 'But then I would be lost forever in the darkness that lies outside, lost among the beings whose nature I know not. Only if the glass is broken is the spell broken. Only then can spirit and body reunite and blessedly find eternal sleep together.'

'I see. But Cagliostro must be removed from the world. If the

mirror were dropped into the ocean where it is a mile deep. . . .

She shuddered. But nodded.

'He must be removed, oui,' she said. 'What happens to me—it is not important. Continue, m'sieu.'

'I think I'm on the track.' He pronounced some words, crudely. 'Does that sound familiar?'

'Yes!' her face lighted. 'It is what he speaks when he wishes to hear but not be seen. But it sounds like this—' She corrected his pronunciation. He repeated after her, the strange, rolling syllables.

'And this?' He spoke again, making a motion with his hand.

'When he wishes to see and be seen. Like this.' She corrected once more. 'And his hands—I'm not sure—there is a certain movement . . .'

He tried, but did no better. Then he stiffened. They heard voices. Real voices. For the first time.

'Yvette!' he whispered. 'We've won the first round. We can hear. Come, the other room. He is there, speaking to someone.'

They moved swiftly back to the great room where one wall of seething darkness represented the mirror. And words came through it.

'Professor Langham?'

'Associate Professor only, I'm afraid.'

'I'm Sergeant Burke, Homicide.'

'So Mrs Graham said. Homicide. Intriguing. What can I do for you, Sergeant?'

'Where were you at three this morning?'

'Here in my room. Working on my thesis. May I ask why you are interested?'

'A girl was strangled outside the Fishnet Bar last night.'

'I don't believe I've heard of the place.'

'One of your students was there. He believes he saw you with the girl who was killed.'

'I am a very ordinary type, Sergeant. And one of my students—in a bar at three in the morning? No wonder they learn so little—academically speaking, of course.'

'He described you pretty closely.'

'Perhaps because he has seen me in class for weeks. Let me assure you, Sergeant, based on their classwork, the powers of recognition and description of my students are limited.'

'Maybe so. Do you know a girl named Elsie Lou Lee?'

'Of course. One of my students. A shy thing.'

'She committed suicide last night. Cut her throat with a razor blade. Her last words were, "He said he wished I was dead and out of the way, so I'm going to die!"'

'A suggestible type, may I remark?'

'Her landlady describes you as the man who sometimes called for her.'

'Believe me, Sergeant, my description would fit twenty thousand men in Boston. I assure you I am too discreet to—fraternize—with a female student.'

'Yeah, I suppose so. But frankly—well, we've had eight women killed in this city in four months. Eight! All young, all without motive. I have to check out everybody.'

'Quite understandable.'

'So—I haven't any warrant—but if you'd be willing to come down and make a statement at Headquarters. . . .'

'With the greatest of pleasure. Let us go.'

Footsteps. A door closing. Silence.

'If only we'd had the rest of the charm,' Harry groaned. 'So that the Sergeant could have seen us! Then we'd have had him for sure.'

'He would have returned to the mirror,' Yvette said sadly. 'It is you who would have paid.'

'Even so—Let's keep trying. Tell me again what he said and how he moved his hands.'

Repetition. Endless. Timeless. Then abruptly the curtain of black vanished and they saw, through the window of the mirror, into his room. In time to see the door open and Laura enter.

She looked distraught and haggard. She advanced swiftly, calling in case Harry might be in the bedroom.

'Harry! Harry, are you here? I must talk to you!'

'Laura!' Harry cried. 'Here. Here!'

She did not turn. She crossed the room, looked into the bedroom, then came and sat back on the studio couch, nervously pulling off her gloves.

'She does not hear,' Yvette said. 'There yet remains some part of the charm incorrect.'

'Laura!' Harry groaned. 'Please, for God's sake, look this way!'

She did not immediately look toward the mirror. But as she sat, nervously playing with her gloves, her gaze swept the room—and finally stopped upon the mirror. And then she saw them.

Slowly, unbelievably, she rose to her feet and approached them.

'Harry?' she whispered. 'Harry?'

'Yes,' he said, then realized she could not hear. He nodded instead. 'Call the police!' He mouthed the words carefully but she stared at him with numb incomprehension. He turned to Yvette. 'Quickly!' he said. 'Paper and pen!'

Yvette ran. But before she returned, Harry saw himself enter

the room. Cagliostro, as himself. And Laura, turning, stared from the man in the doorway to the image in the mirror with mounting disbelief and horror.

'Ah,' said Cagliostro, approaching her. 'Our friends have learned some tricks. I underestimated M'sieu Langham. Now you know.'

'Know what?' Laura asked huskily. 'Harry, I don't understand.'

'You will, my dear. Alas. My plans were so well made. Marriage, a long and honourable career on the faculty. Unlimited opportunities to indulge my little hobby unsuspected—all professors seem so harmless. Now it must end. But perhaps there is still a chance—'

'Laura, look out!' Harry shouted, futilely, Cagliostro approached her—and then his hands were around her throat, throwing her back across the bed, controlling her struggles until she lay still. Breathing hard, he rose. He looked into the mirror.

'Blame yourself, M'sieu Langham,' he said. 'But then, I was growing tired of her. A possessive type. If I can but get her to the river, it is possible I may yet bluff your stupid police into believing in my innocence.'

He turned and was drawing a blanket over Laura when the door burst open and Bart exploded into the room.

'Harry!' he shouted. 'Where's Laura? Mrs. Graham said she came up here. My God, man, don't you know you were seen with that Lee girl only last night before she—'

Abruptly he was silent, staring at the still figure only half concealed.

'Laura fainted, Bart,' Cagliostro said soothingly. 'If you will go for a doctor—'

'Murderer!' The words were a strangled sob as Bart flung himself at the other man. Cagliostro stepped aside and Bart sprawled on the bed atop his sister's body. Before he recovered, Cagliostro held a needle-sharp paperknife he had snatched from the desk.

'My young friend,' he said suavely, 'usually I kill only women. But in your case I will make an exception.'

With the litheness of a fencer he came forward, the point extended. But he was unacquainted with the game called football. The younger man lunged low, caught him around the knees, and flung him backwards. His body stopped only because it came into contact with the face of the mirror. And a myriad of cracks streaked the glass to its every corner.

'The glass!' Yvette said in fervent joy, as she and Harry saw Cagliostro crumple forward, with the paperknife still in his hand. 'Cagliostro himself has broken it!'

Bart Phillips saw the cracked glass, and for just an instant he

was aware of the two figures within the glass, figures already twisting and distorting as the glass came loose. A shower of a thousand sharp fragments fell across the prone man on the floor. In one fragment, Bart saw a single eye staring out at him. In another, a pair of lips murmured, 'Merci.'

Then the reflections were gone and the man on the floor groaned and with difficulty rolled over.

The paperknife emerged from his ribcase beside the heart, and dark blood stained his shirt and coat.

'Harry!' Bart dropped to his knee. 'Harry, *why, why?*'

'I am not your doltish friend Harry, m'sieu,' the dying man said. 'He is lost in some strange dimension where there is neither light, nor time, nor space.' His English now was accented. His features flowed, firmed. They became hook-nosed, sharp-jawed, the features of a man of middle age who has seen far too much of life.

'I am Count Alexander Cagliostro.' The words came with difficulty and were punctuated with blood issuing from the mouth. 'And I go now, his body mine, to meet the death which has awaited me patiently for almost two hundred years.'

He fell back, limp, and in a space of seconds his skin became a loathsome corruption, his hair powdered, and the white bone showed through. The corruption became horror, the horror dried, became dust, and the very bones beneath it melted like wax, falling in upon themselves. A moment later and there were but fragments mixed with dust.

REINCARNATION

'Aleister Crowley bridges the gap between ancient and modern magic. Indeed, he believed himself to be the reincarnation of both Cagliostro and Eliphas Levi, the name assumed by Alfonse Louis Constant, the famous nineteenth-century French occultist and author of several well-known works on magic and the Cabbala. If one believes that Crowley was Levi reincarnated, a great deal in his character is explained. Crowley descended into Levi's life after returning to his own infancy, birth and prenatal state: he then found Levi on the point of death. Thereafter, "I went through quite a number of scenes in Levi's life, most unimportant, though I remember several episodes with his wife and the scenes of my taking various orders in Catholicism." Later, "I have been living in the past once more. Eliphas Levi was born of one of those olive women who flush so doubly and so deeply. It was in a houseshop, on the outskirts (as I suppose) of a town of medium size. A blacksmith's was hard by."'

JOHN SYMONDS,

The Magic of Aleister Crowley

At the time Crowley was undergoing these experiences of a 'previous life' he wrote *The Dream Circean* (1908).

The Dream Circean

ALEISTER CROWLEY

I

Perched at the junction of two of the steepest little streets in Montmartre shines the 'Lapin Agile,' a tiny window filled with gleaming bottles, thrilled through by the light behind, a little terrace with tables, chairs and shrubs, and two dark doors.

Roderic Mason came striding up the steepness of the Rue St. Vincent, his pipe gripped hard in his jaw; for the hill is too abrupt for lounging. On the terrace he stretched himself, twirled round half a dozen times like a dervish, pocketed his pipe, and went stooping through the open doorway.

Grand old Frédéric was there, in his vast corduroys and sou'-wester hat, a 'cello in his hand.

His trim grey beard was a shade whiter than when Roderic had last patronized the 'Lapin,' five years before; but the kindly, gay, triumphant eyes were nowise dimmed by time. He knew Roderic at a glance, and gave his left hand carelessly, as if he had been gone but yesterday. Time ambles easily for the owner of such an eyrie, his life content with wine and song and simple happiness.

It is in such as Frédéric that the hope of the world lies. You could not bribe Frédéric with a motor-car to grind in an office and help to starve and enslave his fellows. The bloated, short-of-breath, bedizened magnates of commerce and finance are not life, but a disease. The monster hotel is not hospitality, but imprisonment. Civilization is a madness; and while there are men like Frédéric there is a hope that it will pass. Woe to the earth when Bumble and Rockefeller and their victims are the sole economic types of man!

Roderic sat down on his favourite bench against the wall, and took stock of things.

How well he remembered the immense Christ at the end of the

room, a figure conceived by a giant of old time, one might have thought, and now covered with a dry, green lichenous rot, so that the limbs were swollen and distorted. It gave an incredibly strong impression of loathsome disease, entirely overpowering the intention of picturing inflicted pain.

Roderic, who, far from being a good man, was actually a Freethinker, thought it a grimly apt symbol of the religion of our day.

On His right stood a plaster Muse, with a lyre, the effect being decidedly improved by someone who had affixed a comic mask with a grinning mouth and a long pink nose; on His left a stone plaque of Lakshmi, the Hindu Venus, a really very fine piece of work, clean and dignified, in a way the one sanity in the room, except for an exquisite pencil sketch of a child, done with all the delicacy and strength of Whistler. The rest of the decoration was a delicious mixture of the grotesque and the obscene. Sketches, pastels, cuts, cartoons, oils, all the media of art, had been exhausted in a noble attempt to flagellate impurity—impurity of thought, line, colour, all we symbolize by womanhood.

Hence the grotesque obscenity in nowise suggested Jewry; but gave a wholesome reaction of life and youth against artificiality and money-lust.

As it chanced, there was nobody of importance in the 'Lapin.' Frédéric, with his hearty voice and his virile roll, more of a dance than a walk, easily dominated the company.

Yet there was at least one really remarkable figure in the pleasant gloom of the little cabaret.

A man sat there, timid, pathetic, one would say a man often rebuffed. He was nigh seventy years of age, maybe; he looked older. For him time had not moved at all, apparently; for he wore the dress of a beau of the Second Empire.

Exquisitely, too, he wore it. Sitting back in his dark corner, the figure would have gained had it been suddenly transplanted to the glare of a state ball and the steps of a throne.

Merrily Frédéric trolled out an easy, simple song with the perfect art—how different from the laborious inefficiency of the Opera!—and came over to Roderic to see that his coffee was to his liking.

'Changes, Frédéric,!' he said, a little sadly. 'Where is Madeleine la Vache?'

'At Lourcine.'

'Mimi l'Engeuleuse?'

'At Clamart.'

'The Scotch Count, who always spoke like a hanging judge?'

'Went to Scotland—he could get no more whisky here on credit.'

'His wife?'

'Poor girl! poor girl!'

'Ah! it was bound to happen. And Bubu Tire-Cravat?'

Frédéric brought the edge of his hand down smartly on the table, with a laugh.

'He had made so many widows, it was only fair he should marry one!' commented the Englishman. And Pea-shooter Charley?'

'Don't know. I think he is in prison in England.'

'Well, well; it saddens. "Where are the snows of yesteryear?" I must have an absinthe; I feel old.'

'You are half my years,' answered Frédéric. 'But come! If yesteryear be past, it is this year now. And all these distinguished persons who are gone, together are not worth one silver shoe-buckle of yonder—' Frédéric nodded towards the old beau.

'True, I never knew him; yet he looks as if he had sat there since Sedan. Who is he?'

'We do not know his name, monsieur,' said Frédéric softly, a little awed; 'but I think he was a duke, a prince—I cannot say what. He is more than that—he is unique. He is—*le Revenant de la Rue des Quatre Vents!*'

'The Ghost of the Street of the Four Winds,' Roderic was immensely taken by the title; a thousand fantastic bases for the sobriquet jumped into his brain. Was the Rue des Quatre Vents haunted by a ghost in his image? There are no ghosts in practical Paris. But of all the ideas which came to him, not one was half so strange as the simple and natural story which he was later to hear.

'Come,' said Frédéric. 'I will present you to him.'

'Monseigneur,' he said, as Roderic stood before him, ready to make his little bow, 'let me present Monsieur Mason, an Englishman.'

The old fellow took no notice. Said Frédéric in his ear: 'Monsieur lives on the Boulevard St. Germain, and loves to paint the streets.'

The old man rose with alacrity, smiled, bowed, was enchanted to meet one of the gallant allies whose courage had—he spoke glibly of the Alma, Inkerman, Sebastopol.

The little comedy had not been lost on Roderic. Wondering, he sat down beside the old nobleman.

What spell had Frédéric wrought of so potent a complexion?

'Sir,' he said, 'the gallantry of the French troops at the Malakoff was beyond all praise; it will live for ever in history.'

To another he might have spoken of the *entente cordiale*; to this man he dared not.

Had not his brain perhaps stopped in the sixties?

Had the catastrophe of '70 broken his heart?

Roderic must walk warily.

But the conversation did not take the expected turn. The old gentleman elegantly, wittily, almost gaily, chattered of art, of music, of the changed appearance of Paris. Here, at any rate, he was *au courant des affaires*.

Yet as Roderic, puzzled and pleased, finished his absinthe he said more seriously than he had yet spoken: 'I hear that monsieur is a great painter' (Roderic modestly waved aside the adjective), 'has painted many pictures of Paris. Indeed, as I think of it, I seem to remember a large picture of St. Sulpice at the Salon of eight years ago—no, seven years ago.'

Roderic stared in surprise. How should any one—such a man, of all men—remember his daub, a thing he himself had long forgotten? The oldster read his thought. 'There was one corner of that picture which interested me deeply, deeply,' he said. 'I called to see you; you had gone—none knew where. I am indeed glad to have met you at last. Perhaps you would be good enough to show me your pictures—you have other pictures of Paris? I am interested in Paris—in Paris itself—in the stones and bricks of it. Might I—if you have nothing better to do—come to your studio now, and see them?'

'I'm afraid the light—' began Roderic. It was now ten o'clock.

'That is nothing,' returned the other. 'I have my own criteria of excellence. A match-glimmer serves me.'

There was only one explanation of all this. The man must be an architect, perhaps ruined in the mad speculations of the Empire, so well described by Zola in *La Curée*.

'At your service, sir,' he said, and rose. The old fellow was surely eccentric; but equally he was not dangerous. He was rich, or he would not be wearing a diamond worth every penny of two thousand pounds, as Roderic, no bad judge, made out. There might be profit, and there would assuredly be pleasure.

They waved, the one an airy, the other a courteous, goodnight to grand old Frédéric, and went out.

The old man was nimble as a kitten; he had all the suppleness of youth; and together they ran rapidly down to the boulevard, where, hailing a fiacre, they jumped in and clattered down towards the Seine.

Roderic sat well back in the carriage, a little lost in thought. But the old man sat upright, and peered eagerly about him. Once he stopped the cab suddenly at a house with a low railing in front of it, well set back from the street, jumped out, examined it

minutely, and then, with a sigh and a shake of the head, came back, a little wearier, a little older.

They crossed the Seine, rattled up the Rue Bonaparte, and stopped at the door of Roderic's studio.

II

'Ah, well, said the old man, as he concluded his examination of the pictures, 'What I seek is not here. If it will not weary you, I will tell you a story. Perhaps, although you have not painted it, you have seen it. Perhaps—bah! I am seventy years of age, and a fool to the end.

'Listen, my young friend! I was not always seventy years of age, and that of which I have to tell you happened when I was twenty-two.

'In those days I was very rich, and very happy. I had never loved; I cared for nobody. My parents were both dead long since. A year of freedom from the control of my good old guardian, the Duc de Castelnau (God rest his soul!), had left me yet taintless as a flower. I had that chivalrous devotion to woman which perhaps never really existed at any time save for rare individuals.

'Such a one is ripe for adventure, and since, as your great poet has said, "Circumstance bows before those who never miss a chance," it was perhaps only a matter of time before I met with one.

'Indeed (I will tell you, for it will help you to understand my story), I once found myself in an extremely absurd position through my fantastic trust in the impeccability of woman.

'It was rather late one night, and I was walking home through a deserted street, when two brutal-looking ruffians came towards me, between them a young and beautiful girl, her face flushed with shame, and screaming in pain; for the savages had each firm hold of one arm, and were forcing her at a rapid pace—to what vile den?

'My fist in the face of one and my foot in the stomach of the other! They sprawled in the road, and, disdaining them, I turned my back and offered my arm to the girl. She, in an excess of gratitude, flung her arms round my neck and began to kiss me furiously—the first kiss I had ever had from a woman, mind you! Maybe I would not have been altogether displeased, but that she stank so foully of brandy that—my gorge rises at the memory. The ruffians, more surprised than hurt, began laughing, but kept well away. I tried to induce the girl to come home; in the end she lost her temper, and fell to belabouring me with her fists. I was not strong enough or experienced enough to contend with a mad-

woman, and I could not allow myself to strike her. She beat me sore. . . .

'I can remember the scene now as if it were yesterday: the bewildered boy, the screaming, swearing, kicking, scratching woman, the two "savages" (honest *bourgeois* enough!) reeling against the houses, crying with laughter, too weak with laughter to stand straight.

'By-and-by they took pity, came forward, and released me from the unpleasant situation.

'But the shame of me, as I slunk away down the streets! I would not go home that night at all, ashamed to face my own servants.

'I told myself, in the end, that this was a rare accident; but for all that there must have remained a slight stain upon the mirror of perfect chivalry. In the old days when they taught logic in the schools one learnt how delicate a flower was a "universal affirmative."

'It was some uneventful months after this "tragedy of the ideal" that I was again walking home very late. I had been to the Jardin des Plantes in the afternoon, and, dining in that quarter, had stayed lingering on the bridge watching the Seine. The moon dropped down behind the houses—with a start I realized that I must go home. There was some danger, you understand, of foot-pads. Nothing, however, occurred until—I always preferred to walk through the narrow streets; there is romance in narrow streets!—I found myself in the Rue des Quatre Vents; not a stone's-throw from this house, as you know.

'I had been thinking of my previous misadventure, and, with the folly of youth, had been indulging in a reverie of the kind that begins "If only." If only she had been a princess ravished by a wicked ogre. If only . . . If only . . .

'On the south side of the Rue des Quatre Vents is a house standing well back from the street, with a railing in front of it—a common type, is it not? But what riveted my attention upon it was that while the front of the house was otherwise entirely dark, from a window on the first floor streamed a blaze of light. The window was wide open to the street; voices came from it.

'The first an old, harsh, menacing voice, with all the sting of hate in it; nay, the sting of something devilish, worse than hate. A corrupt enjoyment of its malice informed it. And the words it spoke were too infamous for me to repeat. They are scarred upon my brain. Addressed to the vilest harridan that scours the gutter for her carrion prey, they would have yet been inhuman, impossible; to the voice that answered . . . !

'It was a voice like the tinkling of a fairy bell. Whoever spoke was little more than a child; and her answer had the purity and strength of an angel. That even the foul monster who addressed her could support it, unblasted, was matter for astonishment.

'Now the older voice broke into filthy insult, a very frenzy of malice.

'I heard—O God!—the swish of a whip, and the sound of it falling upon flesh.

'There was silence, awhile, save for the hideous laughter of the invisible horror inside.

'At last a piteous little moan.

'My blood sang shrill within me. Out of myself, I sprang at the railings, and was over them in a second. Rapidly, and quite unobserved (for the scene was strenuous within), I climbed up the grating of the lower windows, and, reaching up to the edge of the balcony, swung myself up to and over it.

'As I stopped to fetch breath, as yet unperceived, I took in the scene, and was staggered at its strangeness.

'The room, though exquisitely decorated, was entirely bare of furniture, unless one could dignify by that name a heap of dirty straw in one corner, by which stood a flattish wooden bowl, half full of what looked like a crust of bread mashed into pulp with water.

'Half turned away from me stood the owner of the harsh voice and soul abominable. It was a woman of perhaps sixty years of age, the head of an angel—so regular were the features, so silver-white the hair—set upon the deformed body of a dwarf. Hairy hands and twisted arms, a hunched back and bandy legs; in the gnarled right hand a terrible whip, the carved jade handle blossoming into a rose of fine cords, shining with silver—sharp, three-cornered chips of silver! The whole dripped black with blood. Upon the angel face stood a sneer, a snarl, a malediction. The effect upon one's sense of something beyond the ordinary was, too, heightened by her costume; for though the summer was at its height she was clad from head to foot in ermine, starred, more heavily than is usual, with the little black tails in the form of *fleurs-de-lis*.

'In extreme contrast to this monster was a young girl crouching upon the floor. At first sight one would have hardly suspected a human form at all, for from her head flowed down on all sides a torrent of exquisite blonde gold, that completely hid her. Only two little hands looked out, clasped, pleading for mercy, and a fairy child-face looking up—in vain—to that black heart of hatred. Even as I gazed the woman hissed out so frightful a menace that

my blood ran chill. The child shrank back into herself. The other raised her whip. I leapt into the room. The old hag spat one infamous word at me, turned on me with the whip.

"This time I was under no illusions about the sanctity of womanhood. With a single blow I felled her to the ground. My signet-ring cut her lip, and the blood trickled over her cheek. I laughed. But the child never moved—it would seem she hardly comprehended.

"I turned, bowed. "I could not bear to hear your cries," I said—rather obviously, one may admit. "I came—" adding under my breath, "I saw, I conquered." "Who is that?" I added sternly, pointing to the prostrate hag.

"Ah, sir" (she began to cry), "it is my mother." The horror of it was tenfold multiplied. "She—she—" The child blushed, stammered, stopped.

"I heard, mademoiselle," I cried indignantly.

"I am here" (she sobbed) "for a month, starved, whipped—oh! By day the window barred with iron; by night, open, the more to mock my helplessness!" Then, with a sudden cry, her little pink hand darting out and showing a faultless arm: "Look! look! she is on you."

The mother had drawn herself away with infinite stealth, regained her feet, and, a thin stiletto in her hand, was crouched to spring. Indeed, as she leapt I was hard put to it to avoid the lunge; the dagger-edge grazed my arm as I stepped aside.

"I turned. She was on me, flinging me aside with the force of her rush as if I had been a straw. The snarl of her was like a wolf.

"This time she cut me deep. Again a whirl, a rush. I altered my tactics; I ran in to meet her. Hampered as she was by her furs, I was now quicker than she. I struck her dagger arm so strongly that the blade flew into the air, and fell quivering on the floor, the heavy hilt driving the thin blade deep into the polished wood. Even so I had her by the waist, catching her arm, and with one heave of my back I tossed her into the air, careless where she might fall.

"As luck would have it, she struck the balcony rail, broke it, and fell upon the pavement of the court. There was a crash, but no cry, no groan. I went to the balcony. She lay still, as the living do not lie, and her white hair was blackening, lapped by a congealing stream.

"I withdrew into the room. Since I have learnt that any death brings with it a strange sense of relief. There is a certain finality.

La comédie est jouée—and one turns with new life to the next business.

"The golden child had never stirred. But now she crouched lower, and fell to soft, sweet crying.

"Your mother is dead," I said abruptly. "May I offer you the guardianship of my godmother, the Duchess of Castelnau-dary? Come, mademoiselle, let us go."

"I thank you, sir," she answered, still sobbing; "but Jean is awake and at the door. Jean is fierce and lean as an old wolf."

I pulled the dagger from the floor. "I am fierce and lithe as a young lion!" I said. "Let the old wolf beware!"

"But I cannot, sir, I cannot. I. . . ." Her confusion became acute.

"I dare not move, sir—I—I—my mother has taken away all my clothes."

I marvelled. In her palace of gold hair nobody could have guessed it. But now I blushed, and lively. The dilemma was absurd.

"I have it," said I. "I will climb down and bring up the ermine."

She shuddered at the idea. Her dead mother's furs!

"It must be," I said firmly.

"Go, brave knight!"—a delicate smile lit up her face—"I trust myself to you."

I bent on my right knee to her. "I take you," I said, "to be my lady, to fight in your cause, to honour and love you for ever."

She put out her right hand—oh, the delicate beauty of it! I kissed it. "My knight," she said, "Jean is below; he may hear you; you go perhaps to your death—kiss me!"

With a sob I sought her once full in my arms, and our mouths met. I closed my eyes in trance; my muscles failed; I sank, my forehead to the ground before her.

When I opened my eyes again she too was praying. Softly, without a word, I stepped to the window, took the dagger in my teeth, dropped from the edge, landed lightly beside the corpse. She was quite dead, the skull broken in, the teeth exposed in a last snarl. She lay on her back; I opened the coat, turned her over. The gruesome task was nearly finished when the door of the house opened, and an old man, his face scarred, one lip cut half away in some old brawl, so that he grinned horribly and askew, rushed out at me, a rapier in his hand. My stiletto, though long beyond the ordinary, was useless against a tool of such superior reach.

A last wrench gave me the ermine cloak, an invaluable parry. Could I entangle his sword, he was at my mercy. He saw it, and fenced warily. Indeed, I had the upper hand throughout.

Threatening to throw the cloak, catch his sword, blind him, rush in with my dagger—he gave back and back in a circle round the courtyard.

‘No sound came from the room above. Probably we three were alone. The fight was not to be prolonged for ever; the weight of the fur would tire me soon, counter-balance the advantage of age. Then, almost before I knew what had happened, we were fighting in the street. I would not cry for help; one was more likely to rouse a bandit than a guardian of the peace. And, besides, who could say how the law stood?’

‘I had certainly killed a lady; I was doing my best, with the aid of her stolen cloak, to kill a servant of the house; I contemplated an abduction. Best kill him silently, and be gone.’

‘But when and how had Jean pulled open the iron gates and retreated into the street?’

‘It mattered little, though certainly it left an uneasy sense of bewilderment; what mattered was that here we were fighting in semi-darkness—the dawn was not fairly lifted—for life and death.’

‘“Ten thousand crowns, Monsieur Jean,” I cried, “and my service!”—I gave him my style—“I see you can be a faithful servant.”’

‘“Faithful to death!” he retorted, and I was sorry to have to kill him.’

‘We fenced grimly on.’

‘“But,” I urged, “your mistress is dead. Your duty is to her child, and I am her child’s—”’

‘He looked up from my eyes. “An omen!” he cried, pointing to the great statue of St. Michael trampling Satan, for we had come fighting to the Place St. Michel. “Darkness yields to light; I am your servant, sir.” He dropped on one knee, and tendered the hilt of his sword.’

‘But as I put out my hand to take it (guarded against attack, I boast me, but not against the extraordinary trick which followed) he suddenly snatched at the ermine, which lay loosely on my left arm, and, leaving me with sword and dagger, fled with a shriek of laughter across the Place St. Michel, and, flinging the furs over the bridge, himself plunged into the Seine and swam strongly for the other bank.’

There was no object in pursuing him; I would recover the furs, and return triumphant. Alas! they had sunk; they were now whirled far away by the swift river. Where should I get a cloak?

‘How stupid of me! The old woman had plenty of other clothes beneath her furs; I would take them.’

‘And I set myself gaily to run back to the house.’

III

'Whether by excitement I took the wrong turning, or whether—but you will hear!—in short, I do not clearly understand even now why I did not at once find the road. But at least I did fail to find it, discovered, as I supposed, my error, corrected it, failed once more. . . . In the end I got flustered—so much hung on my speedy return!—I fluttered hither and thither like a wild pigeon whose mate has been shot. I stopped short, pulled myself together. Let me think it out! Where am I now? I was under the shadow (the dawn just lit its edge) of the mighty shoulder of St. Sulpice. "More haste, less speed!" I said to myself. "I will walk deliberately down to the boulevard, turn east, and so I cannot possibly miss the Carrefour de l'Odéon"—out of which, as I knew of old, the Rue des Quatre Vents leads. Indeed, I remembered the carrefour from that night. I had passed through it. I remembered hesitating as to which turning to take. For, as you know, the carrefour is a triangle, one road leading from the apex, four (with two minor variations just off the carrefour) from the base.

Following this plan, I came, sure enough, in three minutes or so into the Rue des Quatre Vents. It is not a long street, as you know, and I thought that I remembered perfectly that the house faced the tiny Rue St. Grégoire, which leads back to the Boulevard St. Germain. Indeed, it was down that obscure alley that Jean and I had gone in our fight. I remembered how I had expected to meet somebody on issuing into the boulevard; and then . . . I must have been very busy fighting: I could not remember anything at all of the fight between that issue and the place of Jean's feint and flight.

'Well, here I was: the house should have been in front of me—and it was not. I walked up and down the street; there was no house of the kind, no railings. No residential house. Yet I could not believe myself mistaken. I pinched myself; I was 'awake. Further, the pinching demonstrated the existence of a sword and dagger in my hands. I was bleeding, too; my left arm twice grazed. I took out my watch; four o'clock. Since I left the bridge—ah! when had I left the bridge? I could not tell—yes, I could. At moon-set. The moon was nine days old.

'No; everything was real. I examined the sword and the stiletto. Silver-gilt; blades of exquisite fineness; the cipher of a princely house of France shone in tiny diamonds upon the pommels.

'The thought sent new courage and determination thrilling through me. I had saved a princess from shame and torture; I loved her! She loved me, for I had saved her—ah! but I had not

yet saved her. That was to do.

'But how to act? I had plenty of time. Jean would not return to the house, in all probability. But the markets were stirring; the weapons and my blood would arouse curiosity. Well, how to act?

'The positive certitude that I had had about the name of the street was my bane. Had I doubted I could have more easily carried out the systematic search that I proposed. But as it was my organized patrol of the quarter was not scientific; I was biased. I came back again and again to the street and searched it, as if the house might have been hidden in the gutter or vanished and reappeared by magic; as if my previous search might (by some incredible chance) have been imperfect, through relaxed attention. So one may watch a conjuror, observing every movement perfectly, except the one flash which does the trick.

'The search, too, could not be long; so I reflected as disappointment sobered me. One cannot go far from the Carrefour de l'Odéon in any direction without striking some unmistakable object. The two boulevards, the schools, the Odéon itself, St. Sulpice—one could not be far off. Yet—could I possibly have mistaken the Odéon for the Luxembourg?

'Could I . . . ? . . . ? A host of conjectures chased each other through my brain, bewildering it, leading the will to falter, the steps to halt.

'Beneath, keener anguish than the thrust of a poisoned rapier, stabbed me this poignant pang: my love awaits me, waits for me to save her, to fly with her. . . .

'Where was she ?

'It was broad day; I cleansed myself of the marks of battle, sat down and broke my fast, my sane mind steadily forcing itself to a sober plan of action, beating manfully down the scream of its despair. All day I searched the streets. Passing an antiquary, I showed him my weapons. He readily supplied their history; but—there was none of that family alive, nor had been since the great Revolution. Their goods? The four winds of heaven might know. At those words "the four winds" I rushed out of the shop, as if stung by an adder.

'I drove home, set all my servants hunting for railed houses. They were to report to me in the Rue des Quatre Vents. Any house not accounted for, any that might conceal a mystery, these I would see myself.

'All labour lost! My servants tried. I distrusted their energy: I set myself obstinately to scour Paris.

'There is a rule of mathematics which enables one to traverse completely any labyrinth. I applied this to the city. I walked in

every road of it, marking the streets at each corner as I passed with my private seal. Each railed house I investigated separately and thoroughly. By virtue of my position I was welcome everywhere. But every night I paced the Rue des Quatre Vents, awaiting . . .

Awaiting what? Well, in the end, perhaps death. The children giped at me; passers-by shunned me.

"*Le Revenant*," they whispered, "*de la Rue des Quatre Vents*."

I had forgot to tell you one thing which most steadfastly confirmed me in the search. Two days after the adventure I passed, hot on the quest, by the Morgue. Two women came out. "Not pretty, the fish!" said one. "He with the scarred lip—"

I heard no more, ran in. There on the slab, grinning yet in death, was Jean. His swim had ended him. Faithful to death!

I watched long. I offered a huge sum for his identification. The authorities even became suspicious: why was I so anxious? How could I say? He was the servant of . . .

I did not know my sweet child's name!

So, while a living man, I made myself a ghost.

IV

'It may have been one day some ten years later,' continued the old nobleman, 'when as I paced uselessly the Street of the Four Winds I was confronted by a stern, grey figure, short, stout, and bearded, but of an indescribable majesty and force.

He laid his hand unhesitatingly upon my shoulder. "Unhappy man!" he cried, "thou art sacrificing thy life to a phantom. 'Look not,' quoth Zoroaster, 'upon the Visible Image of the Soul of Nature, for Her name is Fatality.' What thou hast seen—I know not what it is, save that it is as a dog-faced demon that seduceth thy soul from the sacred Mysteries; the Mysteries of Life and Duty."

"Let me tell my story!" I replied, "and you shall judge—for, whoever you may be, I feel your power and truth."

"I am Eliphaz Levi Zahed—men call me the Abbé Constant," returned the other.

"The great magician?"

"The enemy of the great magician."

We went together to my house. I had begun to suspect some trick of Hell. The malice of that devilish old woman, it might be, had not slept, even at her death. Had she hidden the house beneath a magic veil? Or had her death itself in some strange way operated to—to what? Even conjecture paled.

But magic somewhere there must be, and Eliphaz Levi was

the most famous adept in Paris at the time.

'I told my story, just as I have told it to you, but with strong passion.

'“There is an illusion, master!” I ended. “Put forth the power, and destroy it!”

'“Were I to destroy the illusion,” returned the magus, “thinkest thou to see a virgin with gold hair? Nay, but the Eternal Virgin, and a Gold that is not gold.”

'“Is nothing to be done?”

'“Nothing!” he replied, with a strange light in his eyes. “Yet, in order to be able to do nothing, thou must first accomplish everything.

'“One day,” he smiled, seeing my bewilderment, “thou wilt be angry with the fool who proffers such a platitude.”

'I asked him to accept me as a pupil.

'“I require pay,” he answered, “and an oath.”

'“Speak; I am rich.”

'“Every Good Friday,” said the adept, “take thirty silver crowns and offer them to the Hospital for the Insane.”

'“It shall be done,” I said.

'“Swear, then,” he went on, “swear, then, here to me”—he rose, terrible and menacing—“by Him that sitteth upon the Holy Throne and liveth and reigneth for ever and ever, that never again, neither to save life, nor to retain honour, wilt thou set foot in the Street of the Four Winds; so long as life shall last.”

'Even as he bade me, I rose with lifted hand and swore.

'As I did so there resounded in the room ten sharp knocks, as of ivory on wood, in a certain peculiar cadence.

'This was but the first of a very large number of interviews. I sought, indeed, steadfastly to learn from him the occult wisdom of which he was a master; but, though he supplied me with all conceivable channels of knowledge—books, manuscripts, papyri—yet all these were lifeless; the currents of living water flowed not through them. Should one say that the master withheld initiation, or that the pupil failed to obtain it?

'But at least time abated the monomania—for I know now that my whole adventure was but a very vivid dream, an insanity of adolescence. At this moment I would not like to say at what point exactly in the story fact and dream touch; I have still the sword and dagger. Is it possible that in a trance I actually went through some other series of adventures than that I am conscious of? May not Jean have been a thief, whom I dispossessed of his booty? Had I done this unconsciously it would account for both the weapons and the scene in the Morgue. . . . But I cannot say.

'So, too, I learnt from the master that all this veil of life is but a shadow of a vast reality beyond, perceptible only to those who have earned eyes to see withal.

'These eyes I could not earn; a faith in the master sustained me. I began to understand, too, a little about the human brain; of what it is capable. Of Heaven—and of Hell!

'Life passed, vigorous and pleasant; the only memory that haunted me was the compulsion of my oath that never would I again set foot in the Rue des Quatre Vents.

'Life passed, and for the master ended. "The Veil of the Temple is but a Spider's web!" he said, three days before he died. I followed Eliphaz Levi Zahed to the grave.

'I could not follow him beyond.

'For the next year I applied myself with renewed vigour to the study of the many manuscripts which he had left me. No result could I obtain; I slackened. Followed the folly of my life: I rationalized.

'Thus: one day, leaning over the Pont St. Michel, I let the whole strange story flow back through my brain. I remembered my agony; my present calm astonished me. I thought of Levi, of my oath. "He did not mean *for all my life*," I thought; "he meant until I could contemplate the affair without passion. Is not fear failure? I will walk through just once, to show my mastery." In five minutes—with just one inward qualm—again I was treading the well-worn flags of that ensorcelled road.

'Instantly—instantly!—the old delusion had me by the throat. I had broken my oath; I was paying the penalty.

'Crazier than ever, I again sought throughout changed Paris for my dream-love; I shall seek her till I die. If I seem calmer, it is but that age has robbed me of the force of passion. In vain you tell me, laughing, that if she ever lived, she is long since dead; or at least is an old woman, the blonde gold faded, the child-face wrinkled, the body bowed and lax. I laugh at you—at you—for a blaspheming ass. Your folly is too wild to anger me!'

'I did not laugh,' said Roderic gravely.

'Well,' said the old man, rising, 'I fear I have wearied you. . . . I thank you for your patience. . . . I know I am a mad old fellow. But, if you should happen—you know. Please communicate. Here is my card. I must go now. I am expected elsewhere. I am expected.'

BLACK MAGIC SOCIETIES

'Rumours that Black Magic Secret Societies exist in London have long been current. It was in Chelsea that I first met dabblers in the Black Art, among them Aleister Crowley, in whose studio I saw a ritual ceremony. It was a trifle spectacular and dramatic, but none the less harmless to all concerned; whereas what I have seen and heard elsewhere, not only in London, but in Paris and New York, has not always been harmless. I have seen things that have horrified and disgusted me and proved to me that there is a great power of evil abroad in the modern world.'

ELLIOTT T. O'DONNELL,
Secret Cults and Secret Societies of Modern London

The Primate of the Rose

M. P. SHIEL

“Friends of the Rose?” said E. P. Crooks to Smyth one night, at the Savage Club. ‘Is it an actual fact that there are secret societies in London?’

And Smyth, with his expression of lazy surprise, replied: ‘Why, yes. Ask me another time. Come and dine with us too, if you like.’

It is a wonder that Crichton Smyth ever did invite Crooks. As editor of the *Westminster Magazine*, he had known Crooks as a little story-writer, and had never had any such impulse; but suddenly Englishmen, with their genius for discovery, had discovered that they had a Crooks; proceeded to pay him ninepence for writing ‘the’; and then Smyth, with his eyebrows of surprise, muttered: ‘Come and dine with us.’

Smyth was of that better aristocracy, the upper middle-class, which gives to England its ladies: slim, clean-looking, old-blooded—not much blood, and thin: but rare, like wine of Yquem.

Of another family was Crooks—a fatty little man, fat-cheeked, with an outsticking moustache that hung. Still, there was something or other in him—something brisk in his glance, in the dash of his hair across his forehead; and if at seventeen he had vended soda-water from door to door, at twenty-six he was a graduate, and at thirty-six a star.

But he was a gay Romeo, Crooks—in a rather vulgar mood; and Smyth had a sister.

If one had prophesied to Smyth that his sister, Minna Smyth of the Smyths, could possible commit follies for E. P. Crooks, or look twice at Crooks, Smyth would hardly have bothered to smile. . . .

However, the human female can be pretty queer and wayward; and her heart is like spittle on the palm that the Tartar slaps—no telling which way it will pitch.

From that first night of the dinner Minna Smyth showed herself amiable to the celebrity—a *chic* dinner of dated wines in a flat in Westminster: for editors are awfully well-to-do people—do you know? The piano there was a mosaiced thing in mother-of-pearl; and, in turning Miss Smyth's music, Crooks's fingers got positive magnetism, hers negative, and they met.

She was a tall, thin girl of twenty-five, very like Smyth, very English in type, pretty, but washed-out and superfine, with light eyes of the colour of quinine-solution which X-rays make 'fluorescent.' Was Crooks genuinely smitten with this? It is doubtful. Besides, he was married. But she was a conquest worth making, and he was a man ever on the *qui vive* to add yet a photo to his packet, and a feather to his cap.

Minna Smyth, for her part, took studiously from that night to feeding her mind on the spiced meat of Crooks's books, who, meanwhile, had retaliated upon Smyth by banqueting him at the National Liberal, and might drive home anon with him from the Savage, Crooks felt that he was patronizing Smyth; and Smyth felt that he was patronizing Crooks: for when one has known a tremendous man in his days of '£2-a-thousand-words,' one has no respect for his tremendousness—especially Smyth, who was the chilliest thing that the Heavens ever invented. At any rate, they became friendly.

During which time Crooks and Minna Smyth had a way of meeting at private views, lectures, concerts—meetings of which Smyth did not know; letters were written which Smyth did not see; and it happened one evening at the flat, at a moment when Smyth was in the next room, that Minna mentioned to Crooks in the course of conversation that on Friday nights her brother was out 'at his secret society,' and never came home till 4 a.m.

On this Crooks, picking up her hand, said to her: 'I'll come on Friday night.'

She looked at him under her eyes, meditating upon him; then moved her face from side to side, while her lips took the shape of 'No.'

'Something to say,' said he 'I hope you are inexorable.'

Her lids now veiled her eyes, while her bosom rose and rose, unloaded itself of a sigh, and tumbled back.

'Is it yes?' he whispered.

'Crichton!' she breathed, with a sudden expression of shrinking and fright in her eyes.

'Oh, I think that that will be all right about Crichton,' Crooks said.

'You don't *know* him!' she whispered: 'his nose goes white....'

Smyth now came in; and presently, when Minna had gone out, Crooks said to him: 'By the way, how about that wondrous "Friends of the Rose," Smyth, that you are always to tell me of?' He threw himself into roomy red velvet opposite Smyth's red velvet on the other side of a fire—it was December—and drank from a large and fragile glass.

'What can one tell of it, if it is a secret society?' Smyth asked, his eyebrows raised over lazy lids that seemed to strain to be open, for there was an ample valley of country between his eyebrows and his nose-tip.

'I mean to say—is the thing *real*? Is it like *London*?'—from Crooks, who had an inquisitive intellect, and, then, was ever on the quest of 'copy.' He added: 'Years ago I wrote a story about a secret society—you must remember it; but I never for a moment believed that there are such things. Anarchism, yes—Freemasonry—the Irish—'

'Those are mushrooms,' Smyth remarked, his lips giving out a trickle of thick cigar-smoke, languid as himself; while Crooks smoked a briar pipe.

'What! Freemasonry a mushroom?' — from Crooks — 'on the contrary—'

'Comparatively, of course, I meant. And I don't call those secret societies, of whose existence and objects everyone knows. Where's the secrecy? . . . But there are others.'

Crooks bent forward. He knew that Smyth was Cockney, as much a thing of London as was Charles Lamb, sometimes burrowing in some Slav night-club at the docks, or among 'Ye Merrie Men,' when supposed to be at holiday in Homburg: a being deeply initiated into London lore, knowing somewhat more behind those eyebrows of mild surprise than he ever mentioned at table: hence Crooks's interest; and his interest, like his other emotions, was usually shown.

'But in London?' he said. 'Really, now? Why have I never dropped across them? In Paris, yes—'

Smyth answered—his taciturnity sometimes melted when the subject was London—'Paris is to London as a shilling dictionary to the Encyclopaedia Britannica. Everything's in London.'

'Except Paris'—from Crooks.

'Paris is, too: I could take you to the Bal Bullier within half a mile of here. Only, in Paris it has name and fame, in London it is lost.'

'But this "Rose" business—"secret societies"—you assure me they're a fact?'

'I am a member of two; I know of a third; and have suspicions of a fourth.' Smyth laughed a little to himself.

'That's three, say'—Crooks had animated eyes—'now, tell me how I can join them all!'

Smyth chuckled inwardly at this crude enthusiasm; and he said: 'You don't seem quite to realize—they are *secret* societies. There are more multi-millionaires—more experts in Becquerel rays—than members. To become a member of those I know is about as rare a thing as the conjunction of four planets; and requires long preparation. You can't go about "joining them" like that. One of them has consisted of sixteen members since the time of Edward II, another of twenty-three—'

'But what are they *for*?' Crooks fretfully cried. 'What's—what's their *motif*, their *idea*?'

'Different *motifs*. Most are benevolent, I think. All mystic.'

'Then, why on earth are they secret, if they are benevolent?' Crooks peered piercingly into it with the interest of the perplexed busybody: 'The mere fact that they are benevolent—'

'Different reasons for secrecy: some are secret to avoid—hanging sometimes.' Smyth showed his teeth in a silent laugh.

'Then, I don't tumble,' from Crooks. 'Why need they avoid hanging, if they are benevolent?'

'Seems fairly obvious to me,' Smyth remarked, his straining lids half-shut behind his *pince-nez*: 'There are three types of really secret societies—absurd, obscene, and benevolent: and the benevolent ones can only be created for one reason—because Government, so far, is immature and defective. They assist Government by taking the law into their own hands, executing justice, doing good, in cases where Government can't, or won't, yet do it, and calling upon God to witness in a mystic mood.'

'Oho! Is that it? Then, they have my approval. And as to these "Friends of the Rose" tell me the particular—'

'It was a bad day for me,' Smyth interrupted, 'when I mentioned to you "Friends of the Rose," for you have left me no peace since. What business is it of yours? And what can you expect me to tell? Does the great Crooks take it for granted that secrets guarded six centuries will be blabbed to him for the asking? You may be perfectly certain, for instance, that "Friends of the Rose" is not really their name—though it is not unlike that. What can one tell? Perhaps I may tell you that the membership has always been limited to sixteen; or I may tell you that there is a certain apartment somewhere in London of whose existence only one man at a time—occasionally two—has known for five hundred years.'

Crooks winked quick, hearing it; then threw his face about, frowning, fretted, almost offended, for he disliked being 'out of

anything. 'Apartment,' he muttered. . . . 'and who is that one man who knows?'

'The Primate of the Society.'

'Primate . . .' Crooks meditated it over the fire; then animatedly looked up to ask: 'Now, where can that apartment be?'

On which Smyth, tickled, let himself go into a sort of laugh, saying: 'What, want to take a lady there? I am sorry I can't tell you, if only because I have no notion myself. But when the Primate dies—he is a very old man—lives in Camden Town—I shall know.'

'Oh, *you'll* be Primate then?'

Smyth's lids lay closed. He made no answer.

'I should just like half-an-hour's interview with that "very old man who lives in Camden Town",' Crooks mentioned.

And Smyth answered: 'If you saw him hobbling along Gray's Inn Road, it would not occur to you to glance twice at him. London is like that. We brush shoulders with angels at Charing Cross, little divining the depths that some common-looking type has dived, the oddity of his destiny, his store of lore, his giftedness, or the dignity on his head. I know an old patternmaker in Wapping—'

But at this point Minna came in, and, as Crooks's attention was drawn off, Smyth suddenly stopped.

That was a Wednesday.

Now, on Fridays Smyth invariably left his office an hour earlier, dined at home, locked himself in his book-room for two hours, and then went out dumb, like a monk, not to come back till the morning hours.

Years had seen no break in this routine; but this Friday there was a break: for, for some unknown reason, Smyth was back at home before eleven.

In Victoria Street he glanced up at his windows on the second floor; noticed that the drawing-room light seemed low behind the blinds; and muttered something to himself.

He then went up by the lift, opened the flat-door with his key—and did it noiselessly, though he was *far* from admitting to himself that he did it noiselessly. He now glanced into the kitchen, and his eyebrows went higher because of the fact that it was in darkness. He passed, on padded carpet, to two other rooms — no one there: the servants had perhaps gone to the theatre. He then stepped down a passage to the drawing-room door, and, still without sound, turned the handle. But that door was locked: and his eyebrows went higher still.

Standing there, he seemed to come to a sudden decision: and walked sharply, softly, out of the flat.

Down below he stepped into a by-street where there is a Police Ambulance cot; and, standing in the shadow of this, looking toward Victoria Street, he waited.

After half-an-hour he saw Crooks come out of his 'Mansion'; saw him walk away with quite an air of jauntiness; and presently saw his drawing-room lights turned on full.

He slept at the Hotel Victoria that night; and the next morning turned up at Covent House the same cold Smyth as ever—made a jest with the lift-man, going up to his office; and his sub-editor did not dream that day what was in him, nor that its name was Legion.

But in the afternoon his sister Minna, who had spent a day of wonderment and trembling, received a note 'by hand' from him:

'Dear Minna,

I regret that reasons have arisen which make it impossible for us to live any longer together. Pray write me by tomorrow whether you desire to stay on at the flat, or would rather that I took another for you.

Yours,
Crichton.'

So they parted.

She, knowing that he was attached to the flat, left it for one in Maida Vale, he settling an income upon her. From that night of the lowered lights he did not see her again—not for an instant. To her prayers for an explanation he made no answer.

But his pain proved more than he had bargained for, and he would have done better to have left those rooms which had known her presence. Though not very visible to others, there was a friendship and link between them extremely sacred and sweet; and he pretty soon discovered that, in sending her away, he had plucked out his right eye. Sometimes for days now he would absent himself from the office; his thin, palish face went pinched and paler; some grey began to mingle with his hair; his taciturnity turned to something like dumbness.

But he never relented; until, after six months, it came to his ears, through a doctor, that she was not well, and in a tragic fix. And then he wrote to her:

'Dear Minna,

I know everything: and whatever there is to forgive I forgive. Please, dear, come back to my arms.

Yours,
Crichton.'

She would not at first; but then the wings of love proved stronger than her shrinkings: and she took herself back to the old flat.

But she was not well for she, too, had rued and gnashed, chewing the ashes of the fire of passion; so that daily he saw her vanishing like a shadow from him; and in a month she sighed at him, and died, leaving him a little girl to nurse.

As for Crooks, he was at Naples, and it was three months before he had definite knowledge that a child was born, a mother dead. Then he asserted himself. Since that Friday night of Smyth's earlier return he had had no interview with Smyth, for Minna, as it were on her knees, had ever pleaded with him, 'Please, please, try not to meet Crichton!' But now Crooks asserted himself.

He sought out Smyth one night at the Savage, and, standing before Smyth's chair, said: 'Smyth, I must have the child.'

Smyth looked up from the slightly surprising thing in his *Standard* to the slightly surprising object before him, and said 'No.'

'Then, I have to see her sometimes—fair's fair.'

'If you like,' Smyth muttered. 'She is at my flat. Try not to see her often'—he read again.

So Crooks went and revolved philosophic thoughts over the insignificant stick of womanhood, that one could push into a jug: and she exclaimed on seeing his fat face, with hair stuck on it.

Then twice a month he went; and once, when, on meeting Smyth in Smyth's hall, he put out his hand, Smyth, with his eyebrows on high, let his long fingers be shaken. (Smyth, in fact, never participated in a hand-shake with any child of Adam, simply permitted and witnessed it, with surprise.)

And when this had happened several times in the course of a year, one night found Crooks seated by the fire, the child on his knee, over against Smyth, as of old. Without greatly caring, he had set himself to be friends again with Smyth, doing it in a patronizing mood, and so caring nothing for Smyth's surprise—nor, in truth, could he be sure that Smyth was more surprised than usual, since Smyth was for ever surprised. Moreover, Crooks's fame had lately swelled and mellowed; if he had an opinion on this or that matter, that was put into the newspapers; and he was puffed up, the fact being that the little men of his trade and grain have no essential self, nor impregnable self-estimation, which cannot be raised at all by any applause, nor depressed at all by any dispraise: but when the wind blows they are big, and when the wind lulls they are little. As for Crooks, at this time he felt that his presence honoured inventors and philosophers.

And 'Cluck, cluck,' he went, cantering his chick on his knee

with a gee-up cackling; then 'I say, Smyth, did you ever become Primate of the Rose Society?'

'Yes,' Smyth replied with surprise.

'Ah, you did. So *you* have the secret now of that mysterious "Apartment"—'

'Yes,' Smyth replied with surprise.

'Then,' says Crooks to himself, 'I shall *set foot* in that apartment—sooner or later'; and he sat an hour with Smyth.

In this sort of relaxation they co-existed, until the midget Minna, fair and frail like its mother, could crawl, could walk, the months for mourning now long over, though Crichton Smyth still dressed in raiment of the raven—crape never more to leave that sleeve of his. Every Sunday sun-down found him in the Brompton Cemetery moping over a tomb; and most who saw him thought him cold; but some thought not. Meantime, Crooks came fairly regularly to the flat; and he said one night by the fire: 'I shall leave off coming here, Smyth, if you don't talk to me. I have assumed that there can be no resentment left, since you realize that I loved Minna.'

Smyth's lips oozed smoke a minute; then: 'How many others did you love that year?'

'Several perhaps. I consider the question irrelevant—'

'How many have you loved since?'

'Several—many, perhaps. That is quite outside—'

'You are married.'

'Yes, but I am impatient of argument of the subject, Smyth. It simply means that your views on sex-relations are different from mine; and, as mine are the offspring of thought—'

'I am not "arguing",'—from Smyth with sleep-loaded lids: 'it is not a question of anyone's "views." I merely said that you are married, and it is a fact that, if a married man lets himself love a girl of the middle class, he runs a risk of killing her with shame. I do not say that it ought to be so—I am not arguing—I only state, what you know, that it *is* so—at present; and when a death occurs, you get murder. Of course, there is no law against it, but—' He stopped, passing his palm lazily across his raised forehead, his lids closed down, straining to open.

'Men are not exactly angels,' Crooks remarked.

'More like devils, some'—a mutter.

'Not referring to poor me?'

'Your existence seems to do a great deal of harm. I don't know that you do any good.'

'You don't know that my books do good?'

'No, I don't know. I know that men are already getting past "novels" without novelty, and that as soon as women cease to be

children the last "novel" will be written. Yours are entertaining, I believe—'

'Not prophetic? Not vital?'

This tickled three of Smyth's ribs on the right side, and he let out on a breath of disdain: 'Lot of Simple-Simons we still are.'

But at this statement the little maid commenced to lament, and Crooks, handing her to her nurse, kissed her head, murmuring: 'I'll go.'

But, half-way to the door, he turned to say: 'What about that "Apartment" of yours, Smyth, that I am to be taken to? You said you'd consider it.'

Smyth's answer was a little singular. With a push of the lips, pettish, yet mixed with a smile, he said: 'Oh, you keep on about that!'

This was the *sixth* time that Crooks had asked—Smyth knew the number. At the first asking a flush of offence had touched Smyth's forehead at the cocky pushfulness that could prick Crooks to make such a request. But since then Smyth had begun to answer with a certain demur, a flirting reluctance, as of a girl who murmurs 'no,' but blushes 'yes.'

'Oh, you keep on about that. . . .'

'Where's the harm?' asked Crooks on his next visit. 'Provided you can absolutely rely upon my lifelong silence. My curiosity, of course, is intrinsically *literary*. Energize my imagination with an actual sight of the place, and I tell you what—I'll do a series of mystery-stories, and *The Westminster* shall have 'em.'

And Smyth, his lids closed but for a slit that rested on Crooks, answered: 'Ah, Crooks, don't tempt me.'

It was, then, a question of temptation now? Crooks felt exultation. Had not the sister yielded to his tempting? The brother should be his conquest, too. . . .

But on the next occasion of Smyth's temptation, Smyth said with a laugh: 'You don't apparently care whether you urge me to the breach of a vow of office! And you do it with that same facile callousness with which you break your own marriage-vow.'

'Smyth, you will not do as a conscience—you are too pale,' said Crooks. 'Please leave our evil marriage-customs out of the discussion. As to your "vow of office," did you not yourself tell me that sometimes *two* men have known the alleged "Apartment"?'

'Well, yes, I think I did say so. And you conceive, do you, that *you* have a right to be one of the two? Well, perhaps you have—I'll look into the question. But, if ever I do take you, I hope you are not nervous.'

'Fancy a nervous E. P. Crooks! What is there to see, then?'

'It is a little—lethal.'

'Then, I'm the man. But when?'

'I haven't said yes. Give one time. I have to get the approval of others. . . .'

But only three weeks afterwards Smyth yielded. 'Very well,' he said: 'you shall see it; the thing's settled; your imagination shall be "energized," as you call it. But you are not permitted to know *where* the room is: you have to go to it blindfold. And, by the way, you must go disguised: just hang a beard round your ears—that'll do. And be before the Temple Church on Tuesday night, to hear the Law Courts clock strike eleven.'

'*Fiet!*' Crooks cried.

That Tuesday night in October a high wind blew, and by the light of a moon that flew to encounter flying troops of cloud, Crooks stood looking at those eight old tombs, and the circular west-end of the church. The Strand river had thinned now to a trickle of feet: in there in the secrecy of the Inn not a step passed; and Crooks felt upon him the mood of adventure: London was partly Baghdad; this an Arabian night: some time or other he'd make 'copy' of the mood of it. To be disguised, too, was quite novel to him: anon he pawed his false beard with a mock pomposity; then he had the thought: 'But why, after all, the disguise?'; and just then eleven struck.

At its last stroke a step was on the paving, and Crichton Smyth with his crape and raven dress was there. He put finger to lip when Crooks began to say something, beckoned, and Crooks followed out through Hare Court, by Middle Temple Lane, past the under-porter's lodge; when Smyth got into a coupé brougham waiting by the Griffin, Crooks followed in.

'I must blindfold you here,' Smyth said at his ear.

'There remains the inward eye,'—from Crooks—'blindfold away.'

At once Smyth produced two pads of black cotton, and a black ribbon that had two narrower ribbons sewed to its ends; cottons and ribbon he tied over Crooks's eyes and nose: and now it could be seen that the broad ribbon had crimson borders, and three roses embroidered on it.

As soon as it was secured, Smyth, unknown to Crooks, slipped a strip of brass-plate inside the band of Crooks's bowler-hat—a brass-plate on which were etched the words: 'Edgar Crichton Smyth, P.' Whereupon the driver, as if he had waited for all this, went forward without being ordered.

But Crooks understood that they were going eastward. He heard Bennett's Clock quite near above strike the quarter-past. And

presently the following words were uttered within that brougham

Crooks: Talk to me. I am lost in darkness. Silence must be awful to the blind.

Smyth: I don't want to talk. This is not a night like every night for you and me.

Crooks: You think something of that 'Apartment' of yours!

Smyth: It is not an Apartment with 'To Let' in the window. It has no window. I hope you have said your prayers.

Crooks: Men of my birth have no need to say prayers, *Smyth*. Behind and underneath we are essentially religious; and our existence, properly understood, is a prayer.

Smyth: Good thing you are religious behind.

Crooks: Did you not *know* that I am?

Smyth: No, how was I to know? You aren't where one sees you.

Crooks: *Smyth*, you are the most—

Smyth: Don't chatter.

Here *Crooks* could hear a tram droning somewhere through the humdrum plod-clap, plod-clap, of the brougham-horse's hoofs on asphalt; he thought to himself: 'We must be somewhere in Whitechapel; and presently they spoke again:

Crooks: Is it far now?

Smyth: Ten minutes.

Crooks: I don't like the blindfolding, though—and, by the way, what is the disguise for? I understand the blindfold, but why the disguise?

Smyth: You will soon guess why.

Crooks: Your disguise is a mystery, and your blindfolding a plague. Ah, it must be sad to be blind!

Smyth: What about being dead?

Crooks: The dead don't know that they are blind, but the blind know that they are dead. Oh, it is a great thing to see the sun! to be alive, and see it. People don't realize, because the universe is not meant for men to see, but for the lords of older orbs than this to cast down their crowns before. Tomorrow morning when I have back my sight, I shall build me an altar.

Smyth: Don't make any vows at it!

Crooks: Certainly, *Smyth*, you are the most surly and cynical—

Smyth: We get out here.

On this the brougham, without order, stopped; *Smyth*, having

got out, led out Crooks; and, without order, the brougham rolled away.

As it had made several turnings, Crooks did not know in what district of London he now was—he knew that it was East. But no sound of foot-falls passing here; only, he could hear a rush of machinery going on somewhere.

‘Those are alternators driven by steam-turbines,’ he said. ‘But are we in a street?’

‘Sh-h, don’t talk,’ said Smyth.

Crooks next felt himself led by the hand over what seemed to be cobble-stones, where the feet echoed, and there was a draught, so that he thought he must be under some tunnel, or vault. Then he felt himself in the open again, still going over old cobble-stones; and still the thump and rush of machinery reached the ear from somewhere. As for Smyth, he uttered not a word, and would listen to none.

Then there was a stoppage: Crooks knew that a door was being unlocked. And, hearing now a click at his ear, he could guess that Smyth had switched on the light of a torch.

He was next led over bare boards in some place that had a smell of soap and candles, tar and benzoline; and twice his steps tripped over what seemed to be empty bags. Then he was led slowly down some board steps; at the bottom of which Smyth stooped to unlock something—apparently a trapdoor in the ground.

Through this Crooks was led down, Smyth now saying to him: ‘Hold my jacket; these steps are narrow’—and Crooks went down some steep steps of stone, each step a jolt, where he ceased to hear the beat of the machinery.

After this he passed through a passage, apparently of hardened marl, markedly damp and clammy, and uneven to the feet, where even sightless eyes could see and feel the thickness of the darkness; at the far end of which Smyth was again known to open some door—evidently a very heavy one—whose lock gnashed at the key, whose hinges chattered. From which point Crooks was led up steps so narrow, that he could easily feel the wall on either hand, they going now in single file.

To these steps there seemed no end—up and still up; and soon Crooks was afresh conscious of the throb and thresh of steam-machinery, jumbled with the hum of generators making their jew’s-harp music: this business and to-do seeming to increase on the ear, and then, as still up they climbed, seeming to die away. Whenever they came to a landing or passage, Crooks, who was fat, and panted, said to himself ‘at last’; but several times he had

to recommence the climb; and he thought to himself 'Can it be the Tower of London? We are in some tower, within the thickness of the wall'; but he did not say anything: a mood of utter dumbness had come upon him.

At last, in moving along a passage over stone floor, he being then in front of Smyth, he stumbled, apparently in dust or rubbish; the next moment he was stopped, butting upon wall; and 'Hallo,' said he, 'what's this?'

There was no reply. . . .

Waiting against the wall for guidance, Crooks was conscious of a clang behind him, as of a massive portal slammed, and of the croak of a rusty lock being coaxed by a key. Then he was aware of a scraping, as if a ponderous object was being dragged across the corridor; and simultaneously he was aware of an odour under his nose.

'Smyth!' he called out: 'are you there?'

There was no reply. . . .

Now he was aware of a match being struck, then of another, and another. By this time his bones were as cold as the stones that enclosed him.

He suddenly cried out 'Smyth! I am going to take the bandage off!'

Still there was no answer but some moments afterwards there burst upon his startled heart a most bizarre noise, a babbling, or lalling, half-talk, half-song, in some unknown tongue—from Smyth. The next instant Crooks had the bandage snatched from his eyes.

There was light—a pink light—brilliant at first to him; and by it he instantly realized that he was interned. He stood in a room of untooled ashlar some fourteen feet square, with a doorway three feet wide looking down a corridor three feet wide. It was the door of this doorway that had been slammed; but he could still look out, since the door had a hole in its iron—a hole Gothic in shape like the door itself; and outside the door stood an old pricket-candlestick of iron supporting seven candles, all alight, higher than a man's head, occupying all the breadth of the corridor.

Crooks understood that that scraping sound he had heard must have been due to the placing of the candlestick in position, and that the striking of the matches had been for lighting the seven candles, each of which had, before and behind it, a screen of pink porcelain with a pattern of roses—two perpendicular rows of roses—so that, as the candles got lower, they would still glow through a rose.

All this he noticed in some moments; also that there was a handbag open on the floor, out of which he assumed that Smyth had got the sort of linen amice, dotted with roses, which he now wore round his shoulders; moreover, in some moments it had entered his consciousness that the dust and rubbish into which he had stumbled was made of the bones and dust and clothes of men who had ended their days there; moreover, he noticed that, hanging before the hole in the portal, was an old Toledo *puñal* of damascened steel, and he understood that this was mercifully meant for his use against himself, if he so chose. If he had doubted this—if he had cherished a hope—it would have vanished when he saw what was hanging on the shaft of the candlestick—a bit of ebony, or black marble, on which had been scribbled in red pencil:

MINNA AND FOUR OTHERS

But what most froze the current of Crooks's blood was the horrid comedy of Smyth's psalmodying and dancing in his amice a yard beyond the candles, like one putting forth a spell of 'woven paces and of waving hands,' his head cast back, his gaze on Heaven—his pince-nez on his nose! But in what occult Chaldaean was that bleating to Moloch and Baal that his tongue baa'd and bleated? Crooks knew some languages but this recitative had no affinity with any speech of men which he had ever conceived; and then that antic fandango-tangle of writhing palms and twining thighs that went on with the psalming, like some entranced wight steadily treading the treadmill of dance in the land of the tarantula—a piece of witchcraft as antique and aboriginal as torch-lit orgies of Sheba and Egypt . . .

His throat straining out of the hole—his eyes straining out of his head—Crooks sent out to that dread dancer the whisper: '*Smyth, don't do it, Smyth . . .*'

He might as well have whispered to the dust and ashes in which he stood.

After three minutes the ritual ceased; Smyth stood another minute, his brow bowed down, with muttering mouth; then took off and put the amice into a handbag; picked up and put on his hat; and, without speaking, went away, leaving the candles watching there, as for a wake.

THE WIZARD

'The following account of a rural American spell from which his wife was rescued was given to me by a New England resident :

"The wizard," to quote the exact words of my informant, "threw a stick on a chest; the stick bounded like a trapball three times; then he opened the chest, took out something looking like dust or clay, and put it into a cup with water over a fire; then he poured it over a board (after chopping it three times), which he then put up beneath the shingles of the house. Returning to the chest he took a piece of old chain, near the length of my hand, took a hoe and buried the chain near the sill of the door of my wife's house where she would pass; then he went away. I saw my wife coming and called to her not to pass, and to go for a hoe and dig up the place. She did this, and I took up the chain, which burned the ends of all my fingers clean off. The same night the conjuror came back : my wife took two half dollars and a quarter in silver and threw them on the ground before him. The man seemed as if he was shocked, and then offered her his hand, which she refused to take, as I had bid her not to let him touch her. He left and never came to the house again. The spell was broken."

M. DANIEL CONWAY,
Demonology and Devil Lore

Witches' Hollow

H. P. LOVECRAFT

District School Number Seven stood on the very edge of that wild country which lies west of Arkham. It stood in a little grove of trees, chiefly oaks and elms with one or two maples; in one direction the road led to Arkham, in the other it dwindled away into the wild, wooded country which always looms darkly on that western horizon. It presented a warmly attractive appearance to me when first I saw it on my arrival as the new teacher early in September, 1920, though it had no distinguishing architectural feature and was in every respect the replica of thousands of country schools scattered throughout New England, a compact, conservative building painted white, so that it shone forth from among the trees in the midst of which it stood.

It was an old building at that time, and no doubt has since been abandoned or torn down. The school district has now been consolidated, but at that time it supported this school in somewhat niggardly a manner, skimping and saving on every necessity. Its standard readers, when I came there to teach, were still *McGuffey's Eclectic Readers*, in editions published before the turn of the century. My charges added up to twenty-seven. There were Allens and Whateleys and Perkinses, Dunlocks and Abbotts and Talbots—and there was Andrew Potter.

I cannot now recall the precise circumstances of my especial notice of Andrew Potter. He was a large boy for his age, very dark of mien, with haunting eyes and a shock of touselled black hair. His eyes brooded upon me with a kind of different quality which at first challenged me but ultimately left me strangely uneasy. He was in the fifth grade, and it did not take me long to discover that he could very easily advance into the seventh or eighth, but made no effort to do so. He seemed to have only a casual tolerance for his schoolmates, and for their part, they re-

spected him, but not out of affection so much as what struck me soon as fear. Very soon thereafter, I began to understand that this strange lad held for me the same kind of amused tolerance that he held for his schoolmates.

Perhaps it was inevitable that the challenge of this pupil should lead me to watch him as surreptitiously as I could, and as the circumstances of teaching a one-room school permitted. As a result, I became aware of a vaguely disquieting fact; from time to time, Andrew Potter responded to some stimulus beyond the apprehension of my senses, reacting precisely as if someone had called to him, sitting up, growing alert, and wearing the air of someone listening to sounds beyond my own hearing, in the same attitude assumed by animals hearing sounds beyond the pitch-levels of the human ear.

My curiosity quickened by this time, I took the first opportunity to ask about him. One of the eighth-grade boys, Wilbur Dunlock, was in the habit on occasion of staying after school and helping with the cursory cleaning that the room needed.

'Wilbur,' I said to him late one afternoon. 'I notice you don't seem to pay much attention to Andrew Potter, none of you. Why?'

He looked at me, a little distrustfully, and pondered his answer before he shrugged and replied, 'He's not like us.'

'In what way?'

He shook his head. 'He don't care if we let him play with us or not. He don't want to.'

He seemed reluctant to talk, but by dint of repeated questions I drew from him certain spare information. The Potters lived deep in the hills to the west along an all but abandoned branch of the main road that led through the hills. Their farm stood in a little valley locally known as Witches' Hollow which Wilbur described as 'a bad place.' There were only four of them — Andrew, an older sister, and their parents. They did not 'mix' with other people of the district, not even with the Dunlocks, who were their nearest neighbours, living but half a mile from the school itself, and thus, perhaps, four miles from Witches' Hollow, with woods separating the two farms.

More than this he could not—or would not—say.

About a week later, I asked Andrew Potter to remain after school. He offered no objection, appearing to take my request as a matter of course. As soon as the other children had gone, he came up to my desk and stood there waiting, his dark eyes fixed expectantly on me, and just the shadow of a smile on his full lips.

'I've been studying your grades, Andrew,' I said, 'and it seems

to me that with only a little effort you could skip into the sixth—perhaps even the seventh—grade. Wouldn't you like to make that effort?"

He shrugged.

"What do you intend to do when you get out of school?"

He shrugged again.

"Are you going to high school in Arkham?"

He considered me with eyes that seemed suddenly piercing in their keenness, all lethargy gone. "Mr Williams, I'm here because there's a law says I have to be," he answered. "There's no law says I have to go to high school."

"But aren't you interested?" I pressed him.

"What I'm interested in doesn't matter. It's what my folks want that counts."

"Well, I'm going to talk to them." I decided on the moment. "Come along. I'll take you home."

For a moment something like alarm sprang into his expression, but in seconds it diminished and gave way to that air of watchful lethargy so typical of him. He shrugged and stood waiting while I slipped my books and papers into the schoolbag I habitually carried. Then he walked docilely to the car with me and got in, looking at me with a smile that could only be described as superior.

We rode through the woods in silence, which suited the mood that came upon me as soon as we had entered the hills, for the trees pressed close upon the road, and the deeper we went, the darker grew the wood, perhaps as much because of the lateness of that October day as because of the thickening of the trees. From relatively open glades, we plunged into an ancient wood, and when at last we turned down the side road—little more than a lane—to which Andrew silently pointed, I found that I was driving through a growth of very old and strangely deformed trees. I had to proceed with caution; the road was so little used that underbrush crowded upon it from both sides, and, oddly, I recognized little of it, for all my studies in botany, though once I thought I saw saxifrage, curiously mutated. I drove abruptly, without warning, into the yard before the Potter house.

The sun was now lost behind the wall of trees, and the house stood on a kind of twilight. Beyond it stretched a few fields, strung out up the valley; in one, there were cornshocks, in another stubble, in yet another pumpkins. The house itself was forbidding, low to the ground, with half a second storey, gambrel-roofed, with shuttered windows, and the outbuildings stood gaunt and stark, looking as if they had never been used. The

entire farm looked deserted; the only sign of life was in a few chickens that scratched at the earth behind the house.

Had it not been that the lane along which we had travelled ended here, I would have doubted that we had reached the Potter house. Andrew flashed a glance at me, as if he sought some expression on my face to convey to him what I thought. Then he jumped lightly from the car, leaving me to follow.

He went into the house ahead of me. I heard him announce me.

'Brought the teacher. Mr. Williams.'

There was no answer.

Then abruptly I was in the room, lit only by an old-fashioned kerosene lamp, and there were the other three Potters—the father, a tall, stoop-shouldered man, grizzled and greying, who could not have been more than forty but looked much, much older, not so much physically as psychically—the mother, an almost obscenely fat woman—and the girl, slender, tall, and with that same air of watchful waiting that I had noticed in Andrew.

Andrew made the brief introductions, and the four of them stood or sat, waiting upon what I had to say, and somewhat uncomfortably suggesting in their attitudes that I say it and get out.

'I wanted to talk to you about Andrew,' I said. 'He shows great promise, and he could be moved up a grade or two if he'd study a little more.'

My words were not welcomed.

'I believe he's smart enough for eighth grade,' I went on, and stopped.

'If he 'uz in eighth grade,' said his father, 'he's be havin' to go to high school 'fore he 'uz old enough to git outa goin' to school. That's the law. They told me.'

I could not help thinking of what Wilbur Dunlock had told me of the reclusiveness of the Potters, and as I listened to the elder Potter, and thought of what I had heard, I was suddenly aware of a kind of tension among them, and a subtle alteration in their attitude. The moment the father stopped talking, there was a singular harmony of attitude—all four of them seemed to be listening to some inner voice, and I doubt that they heard my protest at all.

'You can't expect a boy as smart as Andrew just to come back here,' I said.

'Here's good enough,' said old Potter. 'Besides, he's ours. And don't ye go talkin' 'bout us now, Mr. Williams.'

He spoke with so latently menacing an undercurrent in his

voice that I was taken aback. At the same time I was increasingly aware of a miasma of hostility, not proceeding so much from any one or all four of them, as from the house and its setting themselves.

'Thank you,' I said. 'I'll be going.'

I turned and went out, Andrew at my heels.

Outside, Andrew said softly, 'You shouldn't be talking about us, Mr. Williams. Pa gets mad when he finds out. You talked to Wilbur Dunlock.'

I was arrested at getting into the car. With one foot on the running board, I turned. 'Did he say so?' I asked.

He shook his head. 'You did, Mr. Williams,' he said, and backed away. 'It's not what he thinks, but what he might do.'

Before I could speak again, he had darted into the house.

For a moment I stood undecided. But my decision was made for me. Suddenly, in the twilight, the house seemed to burgeon with menace, and all the surrounding woods seemed to stand waiting but to bend upon me. Indeed, I was aware of a rustling, like the whispering of wind, in all the wood, though no wind stirred, and from the house itself came a malevolence like the blow of a fist. I got into the car and drove away, with that impression of malignance at my back like the hot breath of a ravaging pursuer.

I reached my room in Arkham at last, badly shaken. Seen in retrospect, I had undergone an unsettling psychic experience; there was no other explanation for it. I had the unavoidable conviction that, however blindly, I had thrust myself in far deeper waters than I knew, and the very unexpectedness of the experience made it the more chilling. I could not eat for the wonder of what went on in that house in Witches' Hollow, of what it was that bound the family together, chaining them to that place, preventing a promising lad like Andrew Potter even from the most fleeting wish to leave that dark valley and go out into a brighter world.

I lay for most of that night, sleepless, filled with a nameless dread for which all explanation eluded me, and when I slept at last my sleep was filled with hideously disturbing dreams, in which beings far beyond my mundane imagination held the stage, and cataclysmic events of the utmost terror and horror took place. And when I rose next morning, I felt that somehow I had touched upon a world totally alien to my kind.

I reached the school early that morning, But Wilbur Dunlock was there before me. His eyes met mine with sad reproach. I could not imagine what had happened to disturb this usually friendly pupil.

'You shouldn't a told Andrew Potter we talked about him,' he said with a kind of unhappy resignation.

'I didn't, Wilbur.'

'I know I didn't. So you must have,' he said. And then, 'Six of our cows got killed last night, and the shed where they were was crushed down on 'em.'

I was momentarily too startled to reply. 'A sudden windstorm,' I began, but he cut me off.

'Weren't no wind last night, Mr. Williams. And the cows were *smashed*.'

'You surely cannot think that the Potters had anything to do with this, Wilbur,' I cried.

He gave me a weary look—the look of one who *knows*, meeting the glance of one who should know but cannot understand, and said nothing more.

This was even more upsetting than my experience of the previous evening. He at least was convinced that there was a connection between our conversation about the Potter family and the Dunlocks' loss of half a dozen cows. And he was convinced with so deep a conviction that I knew without trying that nothing I could say would shake it.

When Andrew Potter came in, I looked in vain for any sign that anything out of the ordinary had taken place since last I had seen him.

Somehow I got through that day. Immediately after the close of the school session, I hastened into Arkham and went to the office of the *Arkham Gazette*, the editor of which had been kind enough, as a member of the local District Board of Education, to find my room for me. He was an elderly man, almost seventy, and might presumably know what I wanted to find out.

My appearance must have conveyed something of my agitation, for when I walked into his office, his eyebrows lifted, and he said, 'What's got your dander up, Mr. Williams?'

I made some attempt to dissemble, since I could put my hand upon nothing tangible, and, viewed in the cold light of day, what I might have said would have sounded almost hysterical to an impartial listener. I said only, 'I'd like to know something about a Potter family that lives in Witches' Hollow, west of the school.'

He gave me an enigmatic glance. 'Never heard of old Wizard Potter?' he asked. And, before I could answer, he went on, 'No, of course, you're from Brattleboro. We could hardly expect Vermonters to know about what goes on in the Massachusetts back country. He lived there first. An old man when I first knew him. And these Potters were distant relatives, lived in Upper Michigan,

inherited the property and came to live there when Wizard Potter died.'

'But what do you know about them?' I persisted.

'Nothing, but what everybody else knows,' he said. 'When they came, they were nice friendly people. Now they talk to nobody, seldom come out—and there's all that talk about missing animals from the farms in the district. The people tie that all up.'

Thus begun, I questioned him at length.

I listened to a bewildering enigma of half-told tales, hints, legends and lore utterly beyond my comprehension. What seemed to be incontrovertible was a distant cousinship between Wizard Potter and one Wizard Whateley of nearby Dunwich—'a bad lot,' the editor called him; the solitary way of life of old Wizard Potter, and the incredible length of time he had lived; the fact that people generally shunned Witches' Hollow. What seemed to be sheer fantasy was the superstitious lore—that Wizard Potter had 'called something down from the sky, and it lived with him or in him until he died';—that a late traveller, found in a dying state along the main road, had gasped out something about 'that thing with the feelers—slimy, rubbery thing with the suckers on its feelers' that came out of the woods and attacked him—and a good deal more of the same kind of lore.

When he finished, the editor scribbled a note to the librarian at Miskatonic University in Arkham, and handed it to me. 'Tell him to let you look at that book. You may learn something.' He shrugged. 'And you may not. Young people now-days take the world with a lot of salt.'

I went supperless to pursue my search for the special knowledge I felt I needed, if I were to save Andrew Potter for a better life. For it was this rather than the satisfaction of my curiosity that impelled me. I made my way to the library of Miskatonic University, looked up the librarian, and handed him the editor's note.

The old man gave me a sharp look, said, 'Wait here, Mr. Williams,' and went off with a ring of keys. So the book, whatever it was, was kept under lock and key.

I waited for what seemed an interminable time. I was now beginning to feel some hunger, and to question my unseemly haste—and yet I felt that there was little time to be lost, though I could not define the catastrophe I hoped to avert. Finally the librarian came, bearing an ancient tome, and brought it around to a table within his range of vision. The book's title was in Latin—*Necronomicon*—though its author was evidently an Arabian, *Abdul Alhazred*, and its text was in somewhat archaic English.

I began to read with interest which soon turned to complete bewilderment. The book evidently concerned ancient, alien races, invaders of earth, great mythical beings called Ancient Ones and Elder Gods, with outlandish names like Cthulhu and Hastur, Shub-Niggurath and Azathoth, Dagon and Ithaqua and Wendigo and Cthugha, all involved in some kind of plan to dominate earth and served by some of its peoples—the Tcho-Tcho, and the Deep Ones, and the like. It was a book filled with cabbalistic lore, incantations, and what purported to be an account of a great interplanetary battle between the Elder Gods and the Ancient Ones and of the survival of cults and servitors in isolated and remote places on our planet as well as on sister planets. What this rigmarole had to do with my immediate problem, with the ingrown and strange Potter family and their longing for solitude and their anti-social way of life, was completely beyond me.

How long I would have gone on reading, I do not know. I was interrupted presently by the awareness of being studied by a stranger, who stood not far from me with his eyes moving from the book I was busy reading to me. Having caught my eye, he made so bold as to come over to my side.

‘Forgive me,’ he said, ‘But what in this book interests a country school teacher?’

‘I wonder now myself,’ I said.

He introduced himself as Professor Martin Keane. ‘I may say, sir,’ he added, ‘that I know this book practically by heart.’

‘A farrago of superstition.’

‘Do you think so?’

‘Emphatically.’

‘You have lost the quality of wonder, Mr. Williams. Tell me, if you will, what brought you to this book—’

I hesitated, but Professor Keane’s personality was persuasive and inspired confidence.

‘Let us walk, if you don’t mind,’ I said.

He nodded.

I returned the book to the librarian, and joined my new-found friend. Haltingly, as clearly as I could, I told him about Andrew Potter, the house in Witches’ Hollow, my strange psychic experience—even the curious coincidence of Dunlock’s cows. To all this he listened without interruption, indeed, with a singular absorption. I explained at last that my motive in looking into the background of Witches’ Hollow was solely to do something for my pupil.

‘A little research,’ he said, ‘would have informed you that many strange events have taken place in such remote places as Dunwich

and Innsmouth—even Arkham and Witches' Hollow,' he said when I finished. 'Look around you at these ancient houses with their shuttered rooms and ill-lit fanlights. How many strange events have taken place under those gambrel roofs! We shall never know. But let us put aside the question of belief! One may not need to see the embodiment of evil to believe in it, Mr. Williams. I should like to be of some small service to the boy in this matter. May I?'

'By all means!'

'It may be perilous—to you as well as to him.'

'I am not concerned about myself.'

'But I assure you, it cannot be any more perilous to the boy than his present position. Even death for him is less perilous.'

'You speak in riddles, Professor.'

'Let it be better so, Mr. Williams. But come—we are at my residence. Pray come in.'

We went into one of those ancient houses of which Professor Keane had spoken. I walked into the musty past, for the rooms were filled with books and all manner of antiquities. My host took me into what was evidently his sitting-room, swept a chair clear of books, and invited me to wait while he busied himself on the second floor.

He was not, however, gone very long—not even long enough for me to assimilate the curious atmosphere of the room in which I waited. When he came back he carried what I saw at once were objects of stone, roughly in the shape of five-pointed stars. He put five of them into my hands.

'Tomorrow after school—if the Potter boy is there—you must contrive to touch him with one of these, and keep it fixed upon him,' said my host. 'There are two other conditions. You must keep one of these at least on your person at all times, and you must keep all thought of the stone and what you are about to do out of your mind. These beings have a telepathic sense—an ability to read your thoughts.'

Startled, I recalled Andrew's charging me with having talked about them with Wilbur Dunlock.

'Should I not know what these are?' I asked.

'If you can abate your doubts for the time being,' my host answered with a grim smile. 'These stones are among the thousands bearing the Seal of R'lyeh which closed the prisons of the Ancient Ones. They are the seals of the Elder Gods.'

'Professor Keane, the age of superstition is past,' I protested.

'Mr. Williams—the wonder of life and its mysteries is never past,' he retorted. 'If the stone has no meaning, it has no power. If

it has no power, it cannot affect young Potter. And it cannot protect you.'

'From what?'

'From the power behind the malignance you felt at the house in Witches' Hollow,' he answered. 'Or was this too superstition?' He smiled. 'You need not answer. I know your answer. If something happens when you put the stone upon the boy, he cannot be allowed to go back home. You must bring him here to me. Are you agreed?'

'Agreed,' I answered.

That next day was interminable, not only because of the imminence of crisis, but because it was extremely difficult to keep my mind blank before the inquiring gaze of Andrew Potter. Moreover, I was conscious as never before of the wall of pulsing malignance at my back, emanating from the wild country there, a tangible menace hidden in a pocket of the dark hills. But the hours passed, however slowly, and just before dismissal I asked Andrew Potter to wait after the others had gone.

And again he assented with that casual air tantamount almost to insolence, so that I was compelled to ask myself whether he were worth 'saving' as I thought of saving him in the depths of my mind.

But I persevered. I had hidden the stone in my car, and, once the others were gone, I asked Andrew to step outside with me.

At this point I felt both helpless and absurd. I, a college graduate, about to attempt what for me seemed inevitably the kind of mumbo-jumbo that belonged to the African wilderness. And for a few moments, as I walked stiffly from the school house toward the car I almost flagged, almost simply invited Andrew to get into the car to be driven home.

But I did not. I reached the car with Andrew at my heels, reached in, seized a stone to slip into my own pocket, seized another, and turned with lightning rapidity to press the stone to Andrew's forehead.

Whatever I expected to happen, it was not what took place.

For, at the touch of the stone, an expression of the utmost horror shone in Andrew Potter's eyes; in a trice, his gave way to poignant anguish; a great cry of terror burst from his lips. He flung his arms wide, scattering his books, wheeled as far as he could with my hold upon him, shuddered, and would have fallen, had I not caught him and lowered him, foaming at the mouth, to the ground. And then I was conscious of a great, cold wind which whirled about us and was gone, bending the grasses and the flowers, rippling the edge of the wood, and tearing away the leaves at the outer band of trees.

Driven by my own terror, I lifted Andrew Potter into the car, laid the stone on his chest, and drove as fast as I could into Arkham, seven miles away. Professor Keane was waiting, no whit surprised at my coming. And he had expected that I would bring Andrew Potter, for he had made a bed ready for him, and together we put him into it, after which Keane administered a sedative.

Then he turned to me. 'Now then, there's no time to be lost. They'll come to look for him—the girl probably first. We must get back to the school house at once.'

But now the full meaning and horror of what had happened to Andrew Potter had dawned upon me, and I was so shaken that it was necessary for Keane to push me from the room and half drag me out of the house. And again, as I set down these words so long after the terrible events of that night, I find myself trembling with that apprehension and fear which seize hold of a man who comes for the first time face to face with the vast unknown and knows how puny and meaningless he is against that cosmic immensity. I knew in that moment that what I had read in that forbidden book at the Miskatonic Library was not a farrago of superstition, but the key to a hitherto unsuspected revelation perhaps far, far older than mankind in the universe. I did not dare to think of what Wizard Potter had called down from the sky.

I hardly heard Professor Keane's words as he urged me to discard my emotional reaction and think of what had happened in scientific, more clinical fashion. After all, I had now accomplished my objective—Andrew Potter was saved. But to insure it, he must be made free of the others, who would surely follow him and find him. I thought only of what waiting horror that quartet of country people from Michigan had walked into when they came to take up possession of the solitary farm in Witches' Hollow.

I drove blindly back to the school. There, at Professor Keane's behest, I put on the lights and sat with the door open to the warm night, while he concealed himself behind the building to wait upon their coming. I had to steel myself in order to blank out my mind and take up that vigil.

On the edge of night, the girl came . . .

And after she had undergone the same experience as her brother, and lay beside the desk, the star-shaped stone on her breast, their father showed up in the doorway. All was darkness now, and he carried a gun. He had no need to ask what had happened; he *knew*. He stood wordless, pointed to his daughter and the stone on her breast, and raised his gun. His inference was

plain—if I did not remove the stone, he meant to shoot. Evidently this was the contingency the professor expected, for he came upon Potter from the rear and touched him with the stone.

Afterwards we waited for two hours—in vain, for Mrs. Potter.

‘She isn’t coming,’ said Professor Keane at last. ‘She harbours the seat of its intelligence—I had thought it would be the man. Very well—we have no choice—we must go to Witches’ Hollow. These two can be left here.’

We drove through the darkness, making no attempt at secrecy, for the professor said the ‘thing’ in the house in the Hollow ‘knew’ we were coming but could not reach us past the talisman of the stone. We went through that close pressing forest, down the narrow lane where the queer undergrowth seemed to reach out toward us in the glow of the head lights, into the Potter yard.

The house stood dark save for a wan glow of lamplight in one room.

Professor Keane leaped from the car with his little bag of star-shaped stones, and went around sealing the house—with a stone at each of the two doors, and one at each of the windows, through one of which we could see the woman sitting at the kitchen table—stolid, watchful, *aware*, no longer dissembling, looking unlike that tittering woman I had seen in this house not long ago, but rather like some great sentient beast at bay.

When he had finished, my companion went around to the front and, by means of brush collected from the yard and piled against the door, set fire to the house heedless of my protests.

Then he went back to the window to watch the woman, explaining that only fire could destroy the elemental force, but that he hoped, still, to save Mrs. Potter. ‘Perhaps you’d better not watch, Williams.’

I did not heed him. Would that I had—and so spared myself the dreams that invade my sleep even yet! I stood at the window behind him and watched what went on in that room—for the smell of smoke was now permeating the house. Mrs. Potter—or what animated her gross body—started up, went awkwardly to the back door, retreated, to the window, retreated from it, and came back to the centre of the room, between the table and the wood stove, not yet fired against the coming cold. There she fell to the floor, heaving and writhing.

The room filled slowly with smoke, hazing about the yellow lamp, making the room indistinct—but not indistinct enough to conceal completely what went on in the course of that terrible struggle on the floor, where Mrs. Potter threshed about as if in mortal convulsion and slowly, half visibly, something or other

took shape—an incredible amorphous mass, only half glimpsed in the smoke, tentacled, shimmering, with a cold intelligence and a physical coldness that I could feel through the window. The thing rose like a cloud above the now motionless body of Mrs. Potter, and then fell upon the stove and drained into it like vapour!

'The stove!' cried Professor Keane, and fell back.

Above us, out of the chimney, came a spreading blackness, like smoke, gathering itself briefly there. Then it hurtled like a lightning bolt aloft, into the stars, in the direction of the Hyades, back to that place from which old Wizard Potter had called it into himself, away from where it had lain in wait for the Potters to come from Upper Michigan and afford it new host on the face of earth.

We managed to get Mrs. Potter out of the house, much shrunken now, but alive.

On the remainder of that night's events there is no need to dwell—how the professor waited until fire had consumed the house to collect his store of star-shaped stones, of the reuniting of the Potter family—freed from the curse of Witches' Hollow and determined never to return to that haunted valley—of Andrew, who, when we came to waken him, was talking in his sleep of 'great winds that fought and tore' and a 'place by the Lake of Hali where they live in glory forever.'

What it was that old Wizard Potter had called down from the stars, I lacked the courage to ask, but I knew that it touched upon secrets better left unknown to the races of men, secrets I would never have become aware of had I not chanced to take District School Number Seven, and had among my pupils the strange boy who was Andrew Potter.

A LOVE INVOCATION

'A woman who wishes to gain the love of a man should procure the following materials from neighbours with whom she has never eaten : coriander, carraway, gum of terebinth, lime, cummin, verdigris, myrrh, some blood of an animal whose throat has been cut, and a piece of broom from a cemetery. On a dark night she is to go into the country with a lighted brazier and throw these different articles one after another into the fire, speaking these words : "O coriander, bring him mad! O carraway bring him wandering without success! O mastic, raise in his heart anguish and tears! O white lime, make his heart wakeful in disquietude! O cummin, bring him possessed! O verdigris, kindle the fire of his heart! O myrrh, make him spend a frightful night! O blood of the victim, lead him panting! O cemetery broom, bring him to my side!"'

JAMES A. MONTGOMERY,
Incantation Texts



The Daemon Lover

SHIRLEY JACKSON

She had not slept well; from one-thirty, when Jamie left and she went lingeringly to bed, until seven, when she at last allowed herself to get up and make coffee, she had slept fitfully, stirring awake to open her eyes and look into the half-darkness, remembering over and over, slipping again into a feverish dream. She spent almost an hour over her coffee—they were to have a real breakfast on the way—and then, unless she wanted to dress early, had nothing to do. She washed her coffee cup and made the bed, looking carefully over the clothes she planned to wear, worried unnecessarily, at the window, over whether it would be a fine day. She sat down to read, thought that she might write a letter to her sister instead, and began, in her finest handwriting, 'Dearest Anne, by the time you get this I will be married. Doesn't it sound funny? I can hardly believe it myself, but when I tell you how it happened, you'll see it's even stranger than that. . . .'

Sitting, pen in hand, she hesitated over what to say next, read the lines already written, and tore up the letter. She went to the window and saw that it was undeniably a fine day. It occurred to her that perhaps she ought not to wear the blue silk dress; it was too plain, almost severe, and she wanted to be soft, feminine. Anxiously she pulled through the dresses in the closet, and hesitated over a print she had worn the summer before; it was too young for her, and it had a ruffled neck, and it was very early in the year for a print dress, but still . . .

She hung the two dresses side by side on the outside of the closet door and opened the glass doors carefully closed upon the small closet that was her kitchenette. She turned on the burner under the coffeepot, and went to the window; it was sunny. When the coffeepot began to crackle she came back and poured herself coffee, into a clean cup. I'll have a headache if I don't get

some solid food soon, she thought, all this coffee, smoking too much, no real breakfast. A headache on her wedding day; she went and got the tin box of aspirin from the bathroom closet and slipped it into her blue pocketbook. She'd have to change to a brown pocketbook if she wore the print dress and the only brown pocketbook she had was shabby. Helplessly, she stood looking from the blue pocketbook to the print dress, and then put the pocketbook down and went and got her coffee and sat down near the window, drinking her coffee, and looking carefully around the one-room apartment. They planned to come back here tonight and everything must be correct. With sudden horror she realized that she had forgotten to put clean sheets on the bed; the laundry was freshly back and she took clean sheets and pillow cases from the top shelf of the closet and stripped the bed, working quickly to avoid thinking consciously of why she was changing the sheets. The bed was a studio bed, with a cover to make it look like a couch, and when it was finished no one would have known she had just put clean sheets on it. She took the old sheets and pillowcases into the bathroom and stuffed them down into the hamper, and put the bathroom towels in the hamper too, and clean towels on the bathroom racks. Her coffee was cold when she came back to it, but she drank it anyway.

When she looked at the clock, finally, and saw that it was after nine, she began at last to hurry. She took a bath, and used one of the clean towels, which she put into the hamper and replaced with a clean one. She dressed carefully, all her underwear fresh and most of it new; she put everything she had worn the day before, including her nightgown, into the hamper. When she was ready for her dress, she hesitated before the closet door. The blue dress was certainly decent, and clean, and fairly becoming, but she had worn it several times with Jamie, and there was nothing about it which made it special for a wedding day. The print dress was overly pretty, and new to Jamie, and yet wearing such a print this early in the year was certainly rushing the season. Finally she thought, This is my wedding day, I can dress as I please, and she took the print dress down from the hanger. When she slipped it on over her head it felt fresh and light, but when she looked at herself in the mirror she remembered that the ruffles around the neck did not show her throat to any great advantage, and the wide swinging skirt looked irresistibly made for a girl, for someone who would run freely, dance, swing it with her hips when she walked. Looking at herself in the mirror she thought with revulsion, It's as though I was trying to make myself look prettier than I am, just for him; he'll think I want to look younger

because he's marrying me; and she tore the print dress off so quickly that a seam under the arm ripped. In the old blue dress she felt comfortable and familiar, but unexciting. It isn't what you're wearing that matters, she told herself firmly, and turned in dismay to the closet to see if there might be anything else. There was nothing even remotely suitable for her marrying Jamie, and for a minute she thought of going out quickly to some little shop nearby, to get a dress. Then she saw that it was close on ten, and she had not time for more than her hair and her make-up. Her hair was easy, pulled back into a knot at the nape of her neck, but her make-up was another delicate balance between looking as well as possible, and deceiving as little. She could not try to disguise the sallowness of her skin, or the lines around her eyes, today, when it might look as though she were only doing it for her wedding, and yet she could not bear the thought of Jamie's bringing to marriage anyone who looked haggard and lined. You're thirty-four years old after *all*, she told herself cruelly in the bathroom mirror. Thirty, it said on the licence.

It was two minutes after ten; she was not satisfied with her clothes, her face, her apartment. She heated the coffee again and sat down in the chair by the window. Can't do anything more now, she thought, no sense trying to improve anything the last minute.

Reconciled, settled, she tried to think of Jamie and could not see his face clearly, or hear his voice. It's always that way with someone you love, she thought, and let her mind slip past today and tomorrow, into the farther future, when Jamie was established with his writing and she had given up her job, the golden house-in-the-country future they had been preparing for the last week. 'I used to be a wonderful cook,' she had promised Jamie, 'with a little time and practice I could remember how to make angel-food cake. And fried chicken,' she said, knowing how the words would stay in Jamie's mind, half-tenderly. 'And Hollandaise sauce.'

Ten-thirty. She stood up and went purposefully to the phone. She dialled, and waited, and the girl's metallic voice said, '. . . the time will be exactly ten-twenty-nine.' Half consciously she set her clock back a minute; she was remembering her own voice saying last night, in the doorway: 'Ten o'clock then. I'll be ready. Is it really *true*?'

And Jamie laughing down the hallway.

By eleven o'clock she had sewed up the ripped seam in the print dress and put her sewing-box away carefully in the closet. With the print dress on, she was sitting by the window drinking another cup of coffee. I could have taken more time over my

dressing after all, she thought; but by now it was so late he might come any minute, and she did not dare try to repair anything without starting all over. There was nothing to eat in the apartment except the food she had carefully stocked up for their life beginning together: the unopened package of bacon, the dozen eggs in their box, the unopened bread and the unopened butter; they were for breakfast tomorrow. She thought of running downstairs to the drugstore for something to eat, leaving a note on the door. Then she decided to wait a little longer.

By eleven-thirty she was so dizzy and weak that she had to go downstairs. If Jamie had had a phone she would have called him then. Instead, she opened her desk and wrote a note 'Jamie, have gone downstairs to the drugstore. Back in five minutes.' Her pen leaked onto her fingers and she went into the bathroom and washed, using a clean towel which she replaced. She tacked the note on the door, surveyed the apartment once more to make sure that everything was perfect, and closed the door without locking it, in case he should come.

In the drugstore she found that there was nothing she wanted to eat except more coffee, and she left it half-finished because she suddenly realized that Jamie was probably upstairs waiting and impatient, anxious to get started.

But upstairs everything was prepared and quiet, as she had left it, her note unread on the door, the air in the apartment a little stale from too many cigarettes. She opened the window and sat down next to it until she realized that she had been asleep and it was twenty minutes to one.

Now, suddenly, she was frightened. Waking without preparation into the room of waiting and readiness, everything clean and untouched since ten o'clock, she was frightened, and felt an urgent need to hurry. She got up from the chair and almost ran across the room to the bathroom, dashed cold water on her face, and used a clean towel; this time she put the towel carelessly back on the rack without changing it; time enough for that later. Hatless, still in the print dress with a coat thrown over it, the wrong blue pocketbook with the aspirin inside in her hand, she locked the apartment door behind her, no note this time, and ran down the stairs. She caught a taxi on the corner and gave the driver Jamie's address.

It was no distance at all; she could have walked it if she had not been so weak, but in the taxi she suddenly realized how imprudent it would be to drive brazenly up to Jamie's door, demanding him. She asked the driver, therefore, to let her off at a corner near Jamie's address and, after paying him, waited till he

drove away before she started to walk down the block. She had never been here before; the building was pleasant and old, and Jamie's name was not on any of the mailboxes in the vestibule, nor on the doorbells. She checked the address; it was right, and finally she rang the bell marked 'Superintendent.' After a minute or two the door buzzer rang and she opened the door and went into the dark hall where she hesitated until a door at the end opened and someone said, 'Yes?'

She knew at the same moment that she had no idea what to ask, so she moved forward toward the figure waiting against the light of the open doorway. When she was very near, the figure said, 'Yes?' again and she saw that it was a man in his shirt-sleeves, unable to see her any more clearly than she could see him.

With sudden courage she said, 'I'm trying to get in touch with someone who lives in this building and I can't find the name outside.'

'What's the name you wanted?' the man asked, and she realized she would have to answer.

'James Harris,' she said. 'Harris.'

The man was silent for a minute and then he said, 'Harris.' He turned around to the room inside the lighted doorway and said, 'Margie, come here a minute.'

'What now?' a voice said from inside, and after a wait long enough for someone to get out of a comfortable chair a woman joined him in the doorway, regarding the dark hall. 'Lady here,' the man said. 'Lady looking for a guy name of Harris, lives here. Anyone in the building?'

'No,' the woman said. Her voice sounded amused. 'No men named Harris here.'

'Sorry,' the man said. He started to close the door. 'You got the wrong house, lady,' he said, and added in a lower voice, 'or the wrong guy,' and he and the woman laughed.

When the door was almost shut and she was alone in the dark hall she said to the thin lighted crack still showing, 'But he *does* live here; I know it.'

'Look,' the woman said, opening the door again a little, 'It happens all the time.'

'Please don't make any mistake,' she said, and her voice was very dignified, with thirty-fours years of accumulated pride. 'I'm afraid you don't understand.'

'What did he look like?' the woman said wearily, the door still only part open.

'He's rather tall, and fair. He wears a blue suit very often. He's a writer.'

'No,' the woman said, and then 'Could he have lived on the third floor?'

'I'm not sure.'

'There was a fellow,' the woman said reflectively. 'He wore a blue suit a lot, lived on the third floor for a while. The Roysters lent him their apartment while they were visiting her folks up-state.'

'That might be it; I thought, though . . .'

'This one wore a blue suit mostly, but I don't know how tall he was,' the woman said. 'He stayed there about a month.'

'A month ago is when—'

'You ask the Roysters,' the woman said. 'They came back this morning. Apartment 3B.'

The door closed, definitely. The hall was very dark and the stairs looked darker.

On the second floor there was a little light from a skylight far above. The apartment doors lined up, four on the floor, uncommunicative and silent. There was a bottle of milk outside 2C.

On the third floor, she waited for a minute. There was the sound of music beyond the door of 3B, and she could hear voices. Finally she knocked, and knocked again. The door was opened and the music swept out at her, an early afternoon symphony broadcast. 'How do you do,' she said politely to this woman in the doorway. 'Mrs. Royster?'

'That's right.' The woman was wearing a housecoat and last night's make-up.

'I wonder if I might talk to you for a minute?'

'Sure,' Mrs. Royster said, not moving.

'About Mr. Harris.'

'What Mr. Harris?' Mrs. Royster said flatly.

'Mr. James Harris. The gentleman who borrowed your apartment.'

'O Lord,' Mrs. Royster said. She seemed to open her eyes for the first time. 'What'd he do?'

'Nothing. I'm just trying to get in touch with him.'

'O Lord,' Mrs. Royster said again. Then she opened the door wider and said, 'Come in,' and then, 'Ralph!'

Inside the apartment was still full of music, and there were suitcases half-unpacked on the couch, on the chairs, on the floor. A table in the corner was spread with the remains of a meal; and the young man sitting there, for a minute resembling Jamie, got up and came across the room.

'What about it?' he said.

'Mr. Royster,' she said. It was difficult to talk against the music.

'The superintendent downstairs told me that this was where Mr. James Harris has been living.'

'Sure,' he said. 'If that was his name.'

'I thought you lent him the apartment,' she said, surprised.

'I don't know anything about him,' Mr. Royster said. 'He's one of Dottie's friends.'

'Not *my* friends,' Mrs. Royster said. 'No friend of mine.' She had gone over to the table and was spreading peanut butter on a piece of bread. She took a bite and said thickly, waving the bread and peanut butter at her husband. 'Not *my* friend.'

'You picked him up at one of those damn meetings,' Mr. Royster said. He shoved a suitcase off the chair next to the radio and sat down, picking up a magazine from the floor next to him. 'I never said more'n ten words to him.'

'You said it was okay to lend him the place,' Mrs. Royster said before she took another bite. 'You never said a word against him, after *all*.'

'I don't say anything about *your* friends,' Mr. Royster said.

'If he'd of been a friend of mine you would have said *plenty*, believe me,' Mrs. Royster said darkly. She took another bite and said, 'Believe me, he would have said *plenty*.'

'That's all I want to hear,' Mr. Royster said, over the top of the magazine. 'No more, now.'

'You see.' Mrs. Royster pointed the bread and peanut butter at her husband. 'That's the way it is, day and night.'

There was silence except for the music bellowing out of the radio next to Mr. Royster, and then she said, in a voice she hardly trusted to be heard over the radio noise.

'Has he gone then?'

'Who?' Mrs. Royster demanded, looking up from the peanut butter jar.

'Mr. James Harris.'

'Him? He must've left this morning, before we got back. No sign of him anywhere.'

'Gone?'

'Everything was fine, though, perfectly fine. I told you,' she said to Mr. Royster, 'I told you he'd take care of everything fine. I can always tell.'

'You were lucky,' Mr. Royster said.

'Not a thing out of place,' Mrs. Royster said. She waved her bread and peanut butter inclusively. 'Everything just the way we left it,' she said.

'Do you know where he is now?'

'Not the slightest idea,' Mrs. Royster said cheerfully. 'But, like I

said, he left everything fine. Why?' she asked suddenly. 'You looking for *him* ?'

'It's very important.'

'I'm sorry he's not here,' Mrs. Royster said. She stepped forward politely when she saw her visitor turn toward the door.

'Maybe the super saw him,' Mr. Royster said into the magazine.

When the door was closed behind her the hall was dark again, but the sound of the radio was deadened. She was halfway down the first flight of stairs when the door was opened and Mrs. Royster shouted down the stairwell, 'If I see him I'll tell him you were looking for him.'

What can I do? she thought, out on the street again. It was impossible to go home, not with Jamie somewhere between here and there. She stood on the sidewalk so long that a woman, leaning out of a window across the way, turned and called to someone inside to come and see. Finally, on an impulse, she went into the small delicatessen next door to the apartment house, on the side that led to her own apartment. There was a small man reading a newspaper, leaning against the counter; when she came in he looked up and came down inside the counter to meet her.

Over the glass case of cold meats and cheese she said, timidly, 'I'm trying to get in touch with a man who lived in the apartment house next door, and I just wondered if you know him.'

'Whyn't you ask the people there?' the man said, his eyes narrow, inspecting her.

It's because I'm not buying anything, she thought, and she said, 'I'm sorry. I asked them, but they don't know anything about him. They think he left this morning.'

'I don't know what you want *me* to do,' he said, moving a little back toward his newspaper. 'I'm not here to keep track of guys going in and out next door.'

She said quickly, 'I thought you might have noticed, that's all. He would have been coming past here, a little before ten o'clock. He was rather tall, and he usually wore a blue suit.'

'Now how many men in blue suits go past here every day, lady?' the man demanded. 'You think I got nothing to do but—'

'I'm sorry,' she said. She heard him say, 'For God's sake,' as she went out the door.

As she walked toward the corner, she thought, he must have come this way, it's the way he'd go to get to my house, it's the only way for him to walk. She tried to think of Jamie: where would he have crossed the street? What sort of person was he actually—would he cross in front of his own apartment house, at random in the middle of the block, at the corner?

On the corner was a news-stand; they might have seen him there. She hurried on and waited while a man bought a paper and a woman asked directions. When the news-stand man looked at her she said, 'Can you possibly tell me if a rather tall young man in a blue suit went past here this morning around ten o'clock?' When the man only looked at her, his eyes wide and his mouth a little open, she thought, he thinks it's a joke, or a trick, and she said urgently, 'It's very important, please believe me. I'm not teasing you.'

'Look, lady,' the man began, and she said eagerly, 'He's a writer. He might have brought magazines here.'

'What you want him for?' the man asked. He looked at her, smiling and she realized that there was another man waiting at the back of her and the newsdealer's smile included him. 'Never mind,' she said, but the newsdealer said, 'Listen, maybe he did come by here.' His smile was knowing and his eyes shifted over her shoulder to the man at the back of her. She was suddenly horribly aware of her over-young print dress, and pulled her coat around her quickly. The newsdealer said, with vast thoughtfulness, 'No I don't know for sure, mind you, but there might have been someone like your gentleman friend coming by this morning.'

'About ten?'

'About ten,' the newsdealer agreed. 'Tall fellow, blue suit. I wouldn't be at all surprised.'

'Which way did he go?' she said eagerly. 'Uptown?'

'Uptown,' the newsdealer said, nodding. 'He went uptown. That's just exactly it. What can I do for you, sir?'

She stepped back, holding her coat around her. The man who had been standing behind her looked at her over his shoulder and then he and the newsdealer looked at one another. She wondered for a minute whether or not to tip the newsdealer but when both men began to laugh she moved hurriedly on across the street.

Uptown, she thought, that's right, and she started up the avenue, thinking: He wouldn't have to cross the avenue, just go up six blocks and turn down my street, so long as he started uptown. About a block farther on she passed a florist's shop; there was a wedding display in the window and she thought, This is my wedding day after all, he might have gotten flowers to bring me, and she went inside. The florist came out of the back of the shop, smiling and sleek, and she said, before he could speak, so that he wouldn't have a chance to think she was buying anything: 'It's *terribly* important that I get in touch with a gentleman who may have stopped in here to buy flowers this morning. *Terribly* important.'

She stopped for breath, and the florist said, 'Yes, what sort of flowers were they?'

'I don't know,' she said, surprised. 'He never—' She stopped and said, 'He was a rather tall young man, in a blue suit. It was about ten o'clock.'

'I see,' the florist said. 'Well, *really*, I'm afraid . . .'

'But it's so important,' she said. 'He may have been in a hurry,' she added helpfully.

'Well,' the florist said. He smiled genially, showing all his small teeth. 'For a *lady*,' he said. He went to a stand and opened a large book. 'Where were they to be sent?' he asked.

'Why,' she said, 'I don't think he'd have sent them. You see, he was coming—that is, he'd *bring* them.'

'Madam,' the florist said; he was offended. His smile became deprecatory, and he went on, 'Really, you must realize that unless I have *something* to go on . . .'

'*Please* try to remember,' she begged. 'He was tall, and had a blue suit, and it was about ten this morning.'

The florist closed his eyes, one finger to his mouth, and thought deeply. Then he shook his head. 'I simply *can't*,' he said.

'Thank you,' she said despondently, and started for the door, when the florist said, in a shrill, excited voice, 'Wait! Wait just a moment, madam.' She turned and the florist, thinking again, said finally, 'Chrysanthemums?' He looked at her inquiringly.

'Oh, *no*,' she said; her voice shook a little and she waited for a minute before she went on. 'Not for an occasion like this.'

The florist tightened his lips and looked away coldly. 'Well, of *course* I don't know the *occasion*,' he said, 'but I'm almost certain that the gentleman you were inquiring for came in this morning and purchased one dozen chrysanthemums. No delivery.'

'You're *sure*?' she asked.

'Positive,' the florist said emphatically. 'That was absolutely the man,' he smiled brilliantly, and she smiled back and said, 'Well, thank you very much.'

He escorted her to the door. 'Nice corsage?' he said, as they went through the shop. 'Red roses? Gardenias?'

'It was very kind of you to help me,' she said at the door.

'Ladies always look their best in flowers,' he said, bending his head toward her. 'Orchids, perhaps?'

'No, thank you,' she said, and he said, 'I hope you find your young man,' and gave it a nasty sound.

Going on up the street she thought, Everyone thinks it's so *funny*: and she pulled her coat tighter around her, so that only the ruffle around the bottom of the print dress was showing.

There was a policeman on the corner, and she thought, Why don't I go to the police—you go to the police for a missing person. And then thought, What a fool I'd look like. She had a quick picture of herself standing in a police station, saying, 'Yes, we were going to be married today, but he didn't come,' and the policemen, three or four of them standing around listening, looking at her, at the print dress, at her too-bright make-up, smiling at one another. She couldn't tell them any more than that, could not say, 'Yes, it looks silly, doesn't it, me all dressed up and trying to find the young man who promised to marry me, but what about all of it you don't know? I have more than this, more than you can see: talent, perhaps, and humour of a sort, and I'm a lady and I have pride and affection and delicacy and a certain clear view of life that might make a man satisfied and productive and happy; there's more than you think when you look at me.'

The police were obviously impossible, leaving out Jamie and what he might think when he heard she'd set the police after him. 'No, no,' she said aloud, hurrying her steps, and someone passing stopped and looked after her.

On the coming corner—she was three blocks from her own street—was a shoeshine stand, an old man sitting almost asleep in one of the chairs. She stopped in front of him and waited, and after a minute he opened his eyes and smiled at her.

'Look,' she said, the words coming before she thought of them, 'I'm sorry to bother you, but I'm looking for a young man who came up this way about ten this morning, did you see him?' And she began her description, 'Tall, blue suit, carrying a bunch of flowers?'

The old man began to nod before she was finished. 'I saw him,' he said. 'Friend of yours?'

'Yes,' she said, and smiled back involuntarily.

The old man blinked his eyes and said, 'I remember I thought, You're going to see your girl, young fellow. They all go to see their girls,' he said, and shook his head tolerantly.

'Which way did he go? Straight on up the avenue?'

'That's right,' the old man said. 'Got a shine, had his flowers, all dressed up, in an awful hurry. You got a girl, I thought.'

'Thank you,' she said, fumbling in her pocket for her loose change.

'She sure must of been glad to see him, the way he looked,' the old man said.

'Thank you,' she said again, and brought her hand empty from her pocket.

For the first time she was really sure he would be waiting for

her, and she hurried up the three blocks, the skirt of the print dress swinging under her coat, and turned into her own block. From the corner she could not see her own windows, could not see Jamie looking out, waiting for her, and going down the block she was almost running to get to him. Her key trembled in her fingers at the downstairs door, and as she glanced into the drugstore she thought of her panic, drinking coffee there this morning, and almost laughed. At her own door she could wait no longer, but began to say, 'Jamie, I'm here, I was so worried,' even before the door was open.

Her own apartment was waiting for her, silent, barren, afternoon shadows lengthening from the window. For a minute she saw only the empty coffee cup, thought, he has been here waiting, before she recognized it as her own, left from the morning. She looked all over the room, into the closet, into the bathroom.

'I never saw him,' the clerk in the drugstore said. 'I know because I would have noticed the flowers. No one like that's been in.'

The old man at the shoeshine stand woke up again to see her standing in front of him. 'Hello again,' he said, and smiled.

'Are you *sure*?' she demanded. 'Did he go on up the avenue?'

'I watched him,' the old man said, dignified against her tone. 'I thought, there's a young man got a girl, and I watched him right into the house.'

'What house?' she said remotely.

'Right there,' the old man said. He leaned forward to point. 'The next block. With his flowers and his shine and going to see his girl. Right into her house.'

'Which one?' she said.

'About the middle of the block,' the old man said. He looked at her with suspicion, and said, 'What you trying to do, anyway?'

She almost ran, without stopping to say: 'Thank you.' Up on the next block she walked quickly, searching the houses from the outside to see if Jamie looked from a window, listening to hear his laughter somewhere inside.

A woman was sitting in front of one of the houses, pushing a baby carriage monotonously back and forth the length of her arm. The baby inside slept, moving back and forth.

The question was fluent, by now. 'I'm sorry, but did you see a young man go into one of these houses about ten this morning? He was tall, wearing a blue suit, carrying a bunch of flowers.'

A boy about twelve stopped to listen, turning intently from one to the other, occasionally glancing at the baby.

'Listen,' the woman said tiredly, 'the kid has his bath at ten. Would I see strange men walking around? I ask you.'

'Big bunch of flowers?' the boy asked, pulling at her coat. 'Big bunch of flowers? I seen him, missus.'

She looked down and the boy grinned insolently at her.

'Which house did he go in?' she asked wearily.

'You gonna divorce him?' the boy asked insistently.

'That's not nice to ask the lady,' the woman rocking the carriage said.

'Listen,' the boy said, 'I seen him. He went in there.' He pointed to the house next door. 'I followed him,' the boy said. 'He give me a quarter.' The boy dropped his voice to a growl, and said. '“This is a big day for me, kid,” he says. Give me a quarter.'

She gave him a dollar bill. 'Where?' she said.

'Top floor,' the boy said. 'I followed him till he give me the quarter. Way to the top.' He backed up the sidewalk, out of reach, with the dollar bill. 'You gonna divorce him?' he asked again.

'Was he carrying flowers?'

'Yeah,' the boy said. He began to screech. 'You gonna divorce him, missus? You got something on him?' He went careering down the street, howling, 'She's got something on the poor guy,' and the woman rocking the baby laughed.

The street door of the apartment house was unlocked; there were no bells in the outer vestibule, and no lists of names. The stairs were narrow and dirty; there were two doors on the top floor. The front one was the right one; there was a crumpled florist's paper on the floor outside the door, and a knotted paper ribbon, like a clue, like the final clue in the paper-chase.

She knocked, and thought she heard voices inside, and she thought, suddenly, with terror, What shall I say if Jamie is there, if he comes to the door? The voices seemed suddenly still. She knocked again and there was silence, except for something that might have been laughter far away. He could have seen me from the window, she thought, it's the front apartment and that little boy made a dreadful noise. She waited, and knocked again, but there was silence.

Finally she went to the other door on the floor, and knocked. The door swung open beneath her hand and she saw the empty attic room, bare lath on the walls, floorboards unpainted. She stepped just inside, looking around; the room was filled with bags of plaster, piles of old newspapers, a broken trunk. There was a noise which she suddenly realized was a rat, and then she saw it, sitting very close to her, near the wall, its evil face alert, bright eyes watching her. She stumbled in her haste to be out with the door closed, and the skirt of the print dress caught and tore.

She knew there was someone inside the other apartment, because she was sure she could hear low voices and sometimes laughter. She came back many times, every day for the first week. She came on her way to work, in the mornings; in the evenings, on her way to dinner alone, but no matter how often or how firmly she knocked, no one ever came to the door.

COMMUNICATION WITH THE DEAD

'It is only within recent times that the attempt to communicate with the dead has been elevated to the dignity of white magic. Here it is necessary to affirm that the phenomena of modern spiritualism are to be distinguished clearly from those of old necromancy. The identity of purpose is apt to connect the methods, but the latter differ generically. To compare them would be almost equivalent to saying the art of alchemy is similar to mercantile pursuits because the acquisition of wealth is the end in either case. It needs to be added that occult writers have sometimes sought ambitiously to represent the communication with departed souls by means of ceremonial magic as something much more exalted than mere spiritualism, whereas the very opposite is nearer the truth. Ancient necromancy was barbarous and horrible in its rites; it is only under the auspices of Eliphas Levi and Pierre Christian that it has been purged and civilized, but in the hands of these elegant magicians it has become simply a process of auto-hallucination, having no scientific consequence whatever. The secret of true evocation belongs to the occult sanctuaries; it is not the process of spiritualism, and still less, so far as may be gleaned, is it that of the magical rituals, nor would the secret at best seem respected by those who possess it, because the higher soul of man transcends evocation, and that which does respond is beneath the initiate.'

A. E. WAITE,
The Book of Black Magic

April in Paris

URSULA K. LEGUIN

Professor Barry Pennywither sat in a cold, shadowy garret and stared at the table in front of him, on which lay a book and a breadcrust. The bread had been his dinner, the book had been his lifework. Both were dry. Dr. Pennywither sighed, and then shivered. Though the lower-floor apartments of the old house were quite elegant, the heat was turned off on April 1st, come what may; it was now April 2nd, and sleeting. If Dr. Pennywither raised his head a little he could see from his window the two square towers of Notre Dame de Paris, vague and soaring in the dusk, almost near enough to touch: for the Island of St. Louis, where he lived, is like a little barge being towed downstream behind the Island of the City, where Notre Dame stands. But he did not raise his head. He was too cold.

The great towers sank into darkness. Dr. Pennywither sank into gloom. He stared with loathing at his book. It had won him a year in Paris—publish or perish, said the Dean of Faculties, and he had published, and been rewarded with a year's leave from teaching, without pay. Munson College could not afford to pay unteaching teachers. So on his scraped-up savings he had come back to Paris, to live again as a student in a garret, to read fifteenth-century manuscripts at the Library, to see the chestnuts flower along the avenues. But it hadn't worked. He was forty, too old for lonely garrets. The sleet would blight the budding chestnut flowers. And he was sick of his work. Who cared about his theory, the Pennywither Theory, concerning the mysterious disappearance of the poet François Villon in 1463? Nobody. For after all his Theory about poor Villon, the greatest juvenile delinquent of all time, was only a theory and could never be proved, not across the gulf of five hundred years. Nothing could be proved. And besides, what did it matter if Villon died on Montfaucon

gallows or (as Pennywither thought) in a Lyons brothel on the way to Italy? Nobody cared. Nobody else loved Villon enough.

Nobody loved Dr. Pennywither, either; not even Dr. Pennywither. Why should he? An unsocial, unmarried, underpaid pedant, sitting alone in an unheated attic in an unrestored tenement trying to write another unreadable book. 'I'm unrealistic,' he said aloud with another sigh and another shiver. He got up and took the blanket off his bed, wrapped himself in it, sat down thus bundled at the table, and tried to light a Gauloise Bleue. His lighter snapped vainly. He sighed once more, got up, fetched a can of vile-smelling French lighter fluid, sat down, rewrapped his cocoon, filled the lighter, and snapped it. The fluid had spilled around a good bit. The lighter lit, so did Dr. Pennywither, from the wrists down. 'Oh hell!' he cried, blue flames leaping from his knuckles, and jumped up batting his arms wildly, shouting 'Hell!' and raging against Destiny. Nothing ever went right. What was the use? It was then 8.12 on the night of April 2nd, 1961.

A man sat hunched at a table in a cold, high room. Through the window behind him the two square towers of Notre Dame cathedral loomed in the spring dusk. In front of him on the table lay a hunk of cheese and a huge, iron-latched, hand-written book. The book was called (in Latin) *On the Primacy of the Element Fire over the Other Three Elements*. Its author stared at it with loathing. Nearby on a small iron stove a small alembic simmered.

Jehan Lenoir mechanically inched his chair nearer the stove now and then, for warmth, but his thoughts were on deeper problems. 'Hell!' he said finally (in Late Mediaeval French), slammed the book shut, and got up. What if his theory was wrong? What if water were the primal element? How could you prove these things? There must be some way—some method—so that one could be sure, absolutely sure, of one single fact! But each fact led into others, a monstrous tangle, and the Authorities conflicted, and anyway no one would read his book, not even the wretched pedants at the Sorbonne. They smelled heresy. What was the use? What good this life spent in poverty and alone, when he had learned nothing, merely guessed and theorized? He strode about the garret, raging, and then stood still. 'All right!' he said to Destiny. 'Very good! You've given me nothing, so I'll take what I want!' He went to one of the stacks of books that covered most of the floor-space, yanked out a bottom volume (scarring the leather and bruising his knuckles when the overlying folios avalanched), slapped it on the table and began to study one page of it. Then,

still with a set cold look of rebellion, he got things ready: sulphur, silver, chalk . . .

Though the room was dusty and littered, his little workbench was neatly and handily arranged. He was soon ready. Then he paused. 'This is ridiculous,' he muttered, glancing out the window into the darkness where now one could only guess at the two square towers. A watchman passed below calling out the hour, eight o'clock on a cold clear night. It was so still he could hear the lapping of the Seine. He shrugged, frowned, took up the chalk and drew a neat pentagram on the floor near his table, then took up the book and began to read in a clear but self-conscious voice: "Haere, haere, audi me . . ." It was a long spell, and mostly nonsense. His voice sank. He was bored and embarrassed. He hurried through the last words, shut the book, and then fell backwards against the door, gap-mouthed, staring at the enormous, shapeless figure that stood within the pentagram, lit only by the blue flicker of its waving, fiery claws

Barry Pennywither finally got control of himself and put out the fire by burying his hands in the folds of the blanket wrapped around him. Unburned but upset, he sat down again. He looked at his book. Then he stared at it. It was no longer thin and grey and titled *The Last Years of Villon: an Investigation for Possibilities*. It was thick and brown and titled *Incantatoria Magna*. On his table? A priceless manuscript dating from 1407 of which the only extant undamaged copy was in the Ambrosian Library in Milan? He looked slowly around. His mouth dropped slowly open. He observed a stove, a chemist's workbench, two or three dozen heaps of unbelievable leatherbound books, the window, the door. His window, his door. But crouching against his door was a little creature, black and shapeless, from which came a dry rattling sound.

Barry Pennywither was not a very brave man, but he was rational. He thought he had lost his mind, and so he said quite steadily, 'Are you the Devil?'

The creature shuddered and rattled.

Experimentally, with a glance at invisible Notre Dame, the professor made the sign of the Cross.

At this the creature twitched; not a flinch, a twitch. Then it said something, feebly, but in perfectly good English—no, in perfectly good French—no, in rather odd French: 'Mais vous estes de Dieu,' it said.

Barry got up and peered at it. 'Who are you?' he demanded, and it lifted up a quite human face and answered meekly, 'Jehan Lenoir.'

'What are you doing in my room?'

There was a pause. Lenoir got up from his knees and stood straight, all five foot two of him. 'This is *my* room,' he said at last, though very politely.

Barry looked around at the books and alembics. There was another pause. 'Then how did I get here?'

'I brought you.'

'Are you a doctor?'

Lenoir nodded, with pride. His whole air had changed. 'Yes, I'm a doctor,' he said. 'Yes, I brought you here. If Nature will yield me no knowledge, then I can conquer Nature herself, I can work a miracle! To the devil with science, then. I was a scientist—' he glared at Barry. 'No longer. They call me a fool, a heretic, well by God I'm worse. I'm a sorcerer, a black magician, Jehan the Black! Magic works, does it? The science is a waste of time. Ha!' he said, but he did not really look triumphant. 'I wish it hadn't worked,' he said more quietly, pacing up and down between folios.

'So do I,' said his guest.

'Who are you?' Lenoir looked up challengingly at Barry, though there was nearly a foot difference in their heights.

'Barry A. Pennywither. I'm a professor of French at Munson College, Indiana, on leave in Paris to pursue my studies of Late Mediaeval Fr—' He stopped. He had just realized what kind of accent Lenoir had. 'What year is this? What century? Please, Dr. Lenoir—' The Frenchman looked confused. The meanings of words change, as well as their pronunciations. 'Who rules this country?' Barry shouted.

Lenoir gave a shrug, a French shrug (some things never change). 'Louis is king,' he said. 'Louis the Eleventh. The dirty old spider.'

They stood staring at each other like wooden Indians for some time. Lenoir spoke first.

'Then you're a man?'

'Yes. Look, Lenoir, I think you—your spell—you must have muffed it a bit.'

'Evidently,' said the alchemist. 'Are you French?'

'No.'

'Are you English?' Lenoir glared. 'Are you a filthy Goddam?'

'No, No. I'm from America. I'm from the—from your future. From the twentieth century A.D.' Barry blushed. It sounded silly, and he was a modest man. But he knew this was no illusion. The room he stood in, his room, was new. Not five centuries old. Unswept, but new. And the copy of Albertus Magnus by his knee

was new, bound in soft supple calfskin, the gold lettering gleaming. And there stood Lenoir in his black gown, not in costume, at home. . . .

'Please sit down, sir,' Lenoir was saying. And he added, with the fine though absent courtesy of the poor scholar, 'Are you tired from the journey? I have bread and cheese, if you'll honour me by sharing it.'

They sat at the table munching bread and cheese. At first Lenoir tried to explain why he had tried black magic. 'I was fed up,' he said. 'Fed up! I've slaved in solitude since I was twenty, for what? For knowledge. To learn some of Nature's secrets. They are not to be learned.' He drove his knife half an inch into the table, and Barry jumped. Lenoir was a thin little fellow, but evidently a passionate one. It was a fine face, though pale and lean: intelligent, alert, vivid. Barry was reminded of the face of a famous atomic physicist, seen in newspaper pictures up until 1953. Somehow this likeness prompted him to say, 'Some are, Lenoir; we've learned a good bit, here and there. . . .'

'What?' said the alchemist, sceptical but curious.

'Well, I'm no scientist—'

'Can you make gold?'

'No, I don't think so, but they do make diamonds.'

'How?'

'Carbon—coal, you know—under great heat and pressure, I believe. Coal and diamond are both carbon, you know, the same element.'

'Element?'

'Now as I say, I'm no—'

'Which is the primal element?' Lenoir shouted, his eyes fiery, the knife poised in his hand.

'There are about a hundred elements,' Barry said coldly, hiding his alarm.

Two hours later, having squeezed out of Barry every dribble of the remnants of his college chemistry course, Lenoir rushed out into the night and reappeared shortly with a bottle. 'O my master,' he cried, 'To think I offered you only bread and cheese!' It was a pleasant burgundy, vintage 1477, a good year. After they had drunk a glass together Lenoir said, 'If somehow I could repay you. . . .'

'You can. Do you know the name of the poet François Villon?'

'Yes,' Lenoir said with some surprise, 'but he wrote only French trash, you know, not in Latin.'

'Do you know how or when he died?'

'Oh, yes; hanged at Montfaucon here in '64 or '65, with a crew of no-goods like himself. Why?'

Two hours later the bottle was dry, their throats were dry, and the watchman had called three o'clock of a cold clear morning.

'Jehan, I'm worn out,' Barry said, 'you'd better send me back.' The alchemist was too polite, too grateful, and perhaps also too tired to argue. Barry stood stiffly inside the pentagram, a tall bony figure muffled in a brown blanket, smoking a Gauloise Bleue. 'Adieu,' Lenoir said sadly. 'Au revoir,' Barry replied.

Lenoir began to read the spell backwards. The candle flickered, his voice softened. 'Me audi, haere, haere,' he read, sighed, and looked up. The pentagram was empty. The candle flickered. 'But I learned so little!' Lenoir cried out to the empty room. Then he beat the open book with his fists and said, 'And a friend like that—a real friend—'

He smoked one of the cigarettes Barry had left him—he had taken to tobacco at once. He slept sitting at his table, for a couple of hours. When he woke he brooded a while, relit his candle, smoked the other cigarette, then opened the *Incantatoria* and began to read aloud: 'Haere, haere. . . .'

'Oh, thank God,' Barry said, stepping quickly out of the pentagram and grasping Lenoir's hand. 'Listen, I got back there—this room, this same room, Jehan! but old, horribly old, and empty, you weren't there—I thought, my God, what have I done? I'd sell my soul to get back there, to him—What can I do with what I've learned? Who'll believe it? How can I prove it? And who the devil could I tell it to anyhow, who cares? I couldn't sleep, I sat and cried for an hour hoping, praying that you would—'

'Will you stay?'

'Yes. Look, I brought these—in case you did invoke me.' Sheepishly he exhibited eight packs of Gauloises, several books, and a gold watch. 'It might fetch a price,' he exclaimed, 'I know paper francs wouldn't do much good.'

At sight of the printed books Lenoir's eyes gleamed with curiosity, but he stood still. 'My friend,' he said, 'You said you'd sell your soul . . . you know . . . So would I. Yet we haven't. How—after all—how did this happen? That we're both men. No devils. No pacts in blood. Two men who've lived in this room. . . .'

'I don't know,' said Barry. 'We'll think that out later. Can I stay with you, Jehan?'

'Consider this your home,' Lenoir said with a gracious gesture around the room, the stacks of books, the alembics, the candle

growing pale. Outside the window, grey on grey, rose up the two great towers of Notre Dame. It was the dawn of April 3rd.

After breakfast (breadcrusts and cheese-rinds) they went out and climbed the south tower. The cathedral looked the same as always, though cleaner than in 1961, but the view was rather a shock to Barry. He looked down upon a little town. Two small islands covered with houses; on the right bank more houses crowded inside a fortified wall; on the left bank a few streets twisting around the college; and that was all. Pigeons chortled on the sunwarmed stone between gargoyles. Lenoir, who had seen the view before, was carving the date (in Roman numerals) on a parapet. 'Let's celebrate,' he said. 'Let's go out into the country. I haven't been out of the city for two years. Let's go clear over there—' he pointed to a misty green hill on which a few huts and a windmill were just visible—'to Montmartre, eh? There are some good bars there, I'm told.'

Their life soon settled into an easy routine. At first Barry was a little nervous in the crowded streets, but, in a spare black gown of Lenoir's he was not noticed as outlandish except for his height. He was probably the tallest man in fifteenth-century France. Living standards were low and lice were unavoidable, but Barry had never valued comfort much; the only thing he really missed was coffee at breakfast. When they had bought a bed and razor—Barry had forgotten his—and introduced him to the landlord as M. Barrie, a cousin of Lenoir's from the Auvergne, their housekeeping arrangements were complete. Barry's watch brought a tremendous price, four gold pieces, enough to live on for a year. They sold it as a wondrous new timepiece from Illyria, and the buyer, a Court chamberlain looking for a nice present to give the king, looked at the inscription—Hamilton Bros., New Haven, 1881—and nodded sagely. Unfortunately he was shut up in one of King Louis' cages for naughty courtiers at Tours before he had presented his gift, and the watch may still be there behind some brick in the ruins of Plessis; but this did not affect the two scholars.

Mornings they wandered about sightseeing the Bastille and the churches, or visiting various minor poets in whom Barry was interested; after lunch they discussed electricity, the atomic theory, physiology, and other matters in which Lenoir was interested, and performed minor chemical and anatomical experiments, usually unsuccessfully; after supper they merely talked. Endless, easy talks that ranged over the centuries but always ended here, in the shadowy room with its window open to the spring night,

in their friendship. After two weeks they might have known each other all their lives. They were perfectly happy. They knew they would do nothing with what they had learned from each other. In 1961 how could Barry ever prove his knowledge of old Paris, in 1482 how could Lenoir ever prove the validity of the Scientific Method? It did not bother them. They had never really expected to be listened to. They had merely wanted to learn.

So they were happy for the first time in their lives; so happy, in fact, that certain desires, always before subjugated to the desire for knowledge, began to awaken. 'I don't suppose,' Barry said one night across the table, 'that you ever thought much about marrying?'

'Well, no,' his friend answered, doubtfully. 'That is, I'm in minor orders . . . and it seemed irrelevant. . . .'

'And expensive. Besides, in my time, no self-respecting woman would want to share my kind of life. American women are so damned poised and efficient and glamorous, terrifying creatures. . . .'

'And women here are little and dark, like beetles, with bad teeth,' Lenoir said morosely.

They said no more about women that night. But the next night they did; and the next; and on the next, celebrating the successful dissection of the main nervous system of a pregnant frog, they drank two bottles of Montrachet '74 and got soused. 'Let's invoke a woman, Jehan,' Barry said in a lascivious bass, grinning like a gargoyle.

'What if I raised a devil this time?'

'Is there really much difference?'

They laughed wildly, and drew a pentagram. 'Haere, haere,' Lenoir began; when he got the hiccups, Barry took over. He read the last words. There was a rush of cold, marshy-smelling air, and in the pentagram stood a wild-eyed being with long black hair, stark naked, screaming.

'Woman, by God,' said Barry.

'Is it?'

It was. 'Here, take my cloak,' Barry said, for the poor thing now stood gawping and shivering. He put the cloak over her shoulders. Mechanically she pulled it round her, muttering, 'Gratias ago, domine.'

'Latin!' Lenoir shouted. 'A woman speaking Latin?' It took him longer to get over that shock than it did Bota to get over hers. She was, it seemed, a slave in the household of the Sub-Prefect of North Gaul, who lived on the smaller island of the muddy island-town called Lutetia. She spoke Latin with a thick Celtic brogue, and did not even know who was Emperor in Rome in her day. A

real barbarian, Lenoir said with scorn. So she was, an ignorant, taciturn, humble barbarian with tangled hair, white skin, and clear grey eyes. She had been waked from a sound sleep. When they convinced her that she was not dreaming, she evidently assumed that this was some prank of her foreign and all-powerful master the Sub-Prefect, and accepted the situation without further questions. 'Am I to serve you, my masters?' she inquired timidly but without sullenness, looking from one to the other.

'Not me,' Lenoir growled, and added in French to Barry, 'Go on; I'll sleep in the store-room.' He departed.

Bota looked up at Barry. No Gauls, and few Romans, were so magnificently tall; no Gauls and no Romans ever spoke so kindly. 'Your lamp' (it was a candle, but she had never seen a candle) 'is nearly burnt out,' she said, 'Shall I blow it out?'

For an additional two sols a year the landlord let them use the store-room as a second-bedroom, and Lenoir now slept alone again in the main room of the garret. He observed his friend's idyll with a brooding, unjealous interest. The professor and the slave-girl loved each other with delight and tenderness. Their pleasure overlapped Lenoir in waves of protective joy. Bota had led a brutal life, treated always as a woman but never as a human. In one short week she bloomed, she came alive, evincing beneath her gentle passiveness a cheerful, clever nature. 'You're turning out a regular Parisienne,' he heard Barry accuse her one night (the attic walls were thin). She replied, 'If you knew what it is for me not to be always defending myself, always afraid, always alone. . . .'

Lenoir sat up on his cot and brooded. About midnight, when all was quiet, he rose and noiselessly prepared the pinches of sulphur and silver, drew the pentagram, opened the book. Very softly he read the spell. His face was apprehensive.

In the pentagram appeared a small white dog. It cowered and hung its tail, then came shyly forward, sniffed Lenoir's hand, looked up at him with liquid eyes and gave a modest, pleading whine. A lost puppy . . . Lenoir stroked it. It licked his hands and jumped all over him, wild with relief. On its white leather collar was a silver plaque engraved, 'Jolie. Dupont, 36 rue de Seine, Paris VIe.'

Jolie went to sleep, after gnawing a crust, curled up under Lenoir's chair. And the alchemist opened the book again and read, still softly, but this time without self-consciousness, without fear, knowing what would happen.

Emerging from his storeroom-bedroom-honeymoon in the morning

Barry stopped short in the doorway. Lenoir was sitting up in bed, petting a white puppy, and deep in conversation with the person sitting on the foot of the bed, a tall redhaired woman dressed in silver. The puppy barked. Lenoir said, 'Good morning!' The woman smiled wondrously.

'Jumping Jesus,' Barry muttered (in English). Then he said, 'Good morning. Where are you from?' The effect was Rita Hayworth, sublimated—Hayworth plus the Mona Lisa, perhaps? 'From Altair, about seven thousand years from now,' she said, smiling still more wondrously. Her French accent was worse than that of a football-scholarship freshman. 'I'm an archaeologist, I was excavating the ruins of Paris III. I'm sorry I speak the language so badly, of course we know it only from inscriptions.'

'From Altair? The star? But you're human—I think—'

'Our planet was colonized from Earth about four thousand years ago—that is, three thousand years from now.' She laughed, most wondrously, and glanced at Lenoir. 'Jehan explained it all to me, but I still get confused.'

'It was a dangerous thing to try it again, Jehan,' Barry accused him. 'We've been awfully lucky, you know.'

'No,' said the Frenchman. 'Not lucky.'

'But after all it's black magic you're playing with—Listen—I don't know your name, madame.'

'Kisk,' she said.

'Listen, Kisk,' Barry said without even a stumble. 'Your science must be fantastically advanced—is there any magic? Does it exist? Can the laws of Nature really be broken, as we seem to be doing?'

'I've never seen nor heard of an authenticated case of magic.'

'Then what goes on?' Barry roared. 'Why does that stupid old spell work for Jehan, for us, that one spell, and here, nowhere else, for nobody else, in five—no, eight—no, fifteen thousand years of recorded history? Why? Why? And where did that damn puppy come from?'

'The puppy was lost,' Lenoir said, his dark face grave. 'Somewhere near this house, on the Isle St-Louis.'

'And I was sorting potsherds,' Kisk said, also gravely, 'in a housesite, Island 2, Pit 4, Section D. A lovely spring day, and I hated it. Loathed it. The day, the work, the people around me.' Again she looked at the gaunt little alchemist, a long, quiet look. 'I tried to explain it to Jehan last night. We have improved the race, you see. We're all very tall, healthy, and beautiful. No fillings in our teeth. All skulls from Early America have fillings in the teeth . . . Some of us are brown, some white, some gold-skinned. But all

beautiful, and healthy, and well-adjusted, and aggressive, and successful. Our professions and degree of success are pre-planned for us in the State Pre-School Homes. But there's an occasional genetic flaw. Me, for instance. I was trained as an archaeologist because the Teachers saw that I really didn't like people, live people. People bored me. All like me on the outside, all alien to me on the inside. When everything's alike, which place is home . . . But now I've seen an unhygienic room with insufficient heating. Now I've seen a cathedral not in ruins. Now I've met a living man who's shorter than me, with bad teeth and a short temper. Now I'm home, I'm where I can be myself, I'm no longer alone!

'Alone,' Lenoir said gently to Barry. 'Loneliness, eh? Loneliness is the spell, loneliness is stronger . . . Really it doesn't seem unnatural.'

Bota was peering round the doorway, her face flushed between the black tangles of her hair. She smiled slyly and said a polite Latin good morning to the newcomer.

'Kislk doesn't know Latin,' Lenoir said with immense satisfaction. 'We must teach Bota some French. French is the language of love, anyway, eh? Come along, let's go out and buy some bread, I'm hungry.'

Kislk hid her silver tunic under the useful and anonymous cloak, while Lenoir pulled on his moth-eaten black gown. Bota combed her hair, while Barry thoughtfully scratched a louse-bite on his neck. Then they set forth to get breakfast. The alchemist and the interstellar archaeologist went first, speaking French; the Gaulish slave and the professor from Indiana followed, speaking Latin, and holding hands. The narrow streets were crowded, bright with sunshine. Above them Notre Dame reared its two square towers against the sky. Beside them the Seine rippled softly in all its shimmering grandeur. It was April in Paris, and on the banks of the river the chestnuts were in bloom.

THE INFLUENCE OF THE SUPERNATURAL

'We often talk about the modern age as a time of materialism, reason, technical and scientific advance, but the supernatural still plays a vitally important part in the world we live in. Many people, still, are religious. Many still believe in astrology, in palmistry, in a variety of superstitions. It is scarcely possible to live for very long without acquiring an interest, however reluctant, in the question of life after death. And each of our minds has its shadowed side, where old terrors mingle with old truths. The supernatural is all around us still, at many different levels: in churches, synagogues, mosques; in dreams; in the antiseptic corridors of parapsychology laboratories; in experiences induced by LSD and other drugs; in newspaper stories of witchcraft, the black art and the desecration of churches; in beliefs about Negroes or Jews—the myths of race; in visions of the Virgin in Egypt or of flying saucers in the Arizona desert; in reports of poltergeists and exorcisms; in faith healing; in the many peculiar occult and religious groups which exist in Europe and the United States; in hero worship—the old, still powerful impulse to make a demigod of a human being, whether a ski champion, a pop singer, a film star or a fictitious secret agent.'

The grip of the supernatural on the mind of modern man ranges from the untarnished relevance to twentieth-century life of the great religious and mythological themes—of fate or sin or sacrifice—to superstitions which, at least at first sight, are very trivial: to tea-leaf reading, ouija boards and lucky numbers.'

RICHARD CAVENDISH,
The Black Art

Cry Witch!

FRITZ LEIBER

The girl was very beautiful and she came into the café on the arm of a young writer whose fearless idealism has made him one of the most talked of figures of today. Still, it seemed odd to me that old Nemecek should ignore my question in order to eye her. Old Nemecek loves to argue better than to eat or drink, or, I had thought, to love, and in any case he is very old.

Indeed, old Nemecek is almost incredibly old. He came to New York when the homeland of the Czechs was still called Bohemia, and he was old then. Now his face is like a richly-tooled brown leather mask and his hands are those of a dapperly-gloved skeleton and his voice, though mellow, is whispery. His figure is crooked and small and limping, and I sometimes feel that he came from a land of ancient myth. Yet there are times when a certain fiery youthfulness flashes from his eyes.

The girl looked our way and her glance stopped at Nemecek. For a moment I thought they had recognized each other. A cryptic look passed between them, a guardedly smiling, coolly curious, rapid, reminiscent look, as if they had been lovers long ago, incredible as that might be. Then the girl and her escort went on to the bar and old Nemecek turned back to me.

'Idealism?' he queried, showing that at least he had not forgotten my question. 'It is strange you should ask that now. Yes, I certainly am an idealist and have always been one, though I have been deserted and betrayed by my ideals often enough, and seen them exploited in the market place and turned to swords and instruments of torture in the hands of my enemies.'

The tone of his voice, at once bitter and tender, was the same as a man might use in talking of a woman he had known and lost long ago and still loved deeply.

'Ideals,' he said softly and fingered the glass of brandy before

him and looked at me through the eye-holes of his Spanish leather mask. 'I will tell you a story about them. It happened to a very close friend of mine in old Bohemia. It is a very old story, and like all the best old stories, a love story.'

She was not like the other village girls, this girl my friend fell in love with (said Nemecek). With the other village girls he was awkward, shy, and too inclined to nurse impossible desires. He walked past their houses late at night, hoping they would be looking out of a darkened window, warm white ghosts in their cotton gowns. Or wandering along the forest path he imagined that they would be waiting alone for him just around the next turn, the sunlight dappling their gay skirts and their smiles. But they never were.

With her it worked out more happily. Sometimes it seemed that my friend had always known her, back even to that time when a jolly Old Man in Black had made noises at him in his crib and tickled his ribs; and always their meetings had the same magical conformity to his moods. He would be trudging up the lane, where the trees bend close and the ivy clings to the cool grey wall, thinking of nothing, when suddenly he would feel a hand at his elbow and turn and see her grave, mysterious, sweet face, a little ruffled from having run to overtake him.

When there was dancing in the square and the fiddles squealed and the boards thundered and the bonfires splashed ruddy gilt, she would slip out of the weaving crowd and they would whirl and stamp together. And at night he could hear her scratching softly at his bedroom window like a cat almost before he realized what it was he had been listening for.

My friend did not know her name or where she lived. He did not ask her. With regard to that he was conscious of an unspoken agreement between them. But she always turned up when he wanted her and she was very artful in her choice of the moment to slip away.

More and more he came to live for the hours they spent together. He became contemptuous of the village and its ways. He recognized, with the clarity of anger, the village's shams and meannesses and half-masked brutalities. His parents noticed this and upbraided him. He no longer went to church, they complained. He sneered at the schoolmaster. He was disrespectful to the mayor. He played outrageous tricks on the shopkeepers. He was not interested in work or in getting ahead. He had become a good-for-nothing.

When this happened he always expected them to accuse him of

wasting his time on a strange girl, and to put the blame on her. Their failure to do this puzzled him. His curiosity as to her identity was reawakened.

She was not a village girl, she was not a gypsy, and she certainly was not the daughter of the nobleman whose cattle stood at the head of the valley. She seemed to exist for him alone. Yet, if experience had taught him anything, it had taught him that nothing existed for him alone. Everything in the village had its use, even the beggar who was pitied and the dog who was kicked. He racked his brains as to what hers might be. He tried to get her to tell him without asking a direct question, but she refused to be drawn. Several times he planned to follow her home. When that happened she merely stayed with him until he had forgotten his plan, and by the time he remembered it she was gone.

But he was growing more and more dissatisfied with the conditions of their relationship. No matter how delightful, this meet-at-the-corner, kiss-in-the-dark business could not go on forever. They really ought to get married.

My friend began to wonder if she could be concealing something shameful about her background. Now when he walked arm-in-arm around the square with her, he fancied that people were smirking at him and whispering behind his back. And when he happened on a group of the other young men of the village, the talk would break off suddenly and there would be knowing winks. He decided that, whatever the cost, he must know.

It was near May Eve. They had met in the orchard opposite the old stone wall, and she was leaning against a bough crusted with white blossoms. Now that the moment had come, he was trembling. He knew that she would tell the truth and it frightened him.

She smiled a little ruefully, but answered without hesitation.

'What do I do in the village? Why, I sleep with all of them—the farmers, the preacher, the schoolmaster, the mayor. . . .'

There was a stinging pain in the palm of his hand. He had slapped her face and turned his back on her, and he was striding up the lane, toward the hills. And beside him was striding an Old Man in Black, not nearly so jolly as he had remembered him, cadaverous in fact and with high forehead deeply furrowed and eyes frosty as the stars.

For a long way they went in silence, as old comrades might. Over the stone bridge, where once he and she had dropped a silver coin into the stream, past the roadside shrine with its withered flowers and faded saint, through, the thin forest, where a lock of his hair and hers were clipped together in a split tree, and

across the upland pasture. Finally he found words for his anger.

'If only she hadn't said it with that hangdog air, and yet as if expecting to be praised! And if it had happened only with some of the young fellows! But those old hypocrites!'

He paused, but the Old Man in Black said nothing, only a certain cold merriment was apparent in his eyes.

'How can she do it and still stay so lovely?' my friend continued. 'And how can they know her and not be changed by it? I tell you I gave up a great deal for her! But they can enjoy her and still stick like leeches to the same old lies. It's unfair. If they don't believe in her, why do they want her?'

The Old Man laughed shortly and spoke, and the laugh and the words were like a wind high above the earth.

'She is a harlot, yet whosoever possesses her becomes highly respectable thereby. That is a riddle.'

'I have not become respectable.'

The Old Man showed his teeth in a wintry smile. 'You really love her. Like old King David, *they* desire only to be warm.'

'And she really sleeps with them all? Just as she said?'

The Old Man shook his head. 'Not all. There are a few who turn her away. The philosopher who stays in the little cottage down the road and scowls at the religious processions and tells the children there is no god. The nobleman whose castle stands at the head of the valley. The bandit who lives in the cave on the hill. But even they cannot always endure life without her, and then they get up in the chilly night and go to the window and open it, and the bandit goes to the frost-rimmed mouth of his cave, and they call brokenly in the moonlight, hating themselves for it, and she comes, or her ghost.'

The Old Man turned his head and his sunken eyes were very bright.

'They are weak,' he said, 'But you may be stronger. It's a gay life in the crags.'

'Old Man,' my friend answered, 'you've shown me two paths and I'll take neither. I won't leave her and freeze to death in the crags, no matter how gaily. And I won't share her with those fat hypocrites. I have a plan.'

And he turned and went whistling down the hill, his hands in his pockets.

When he had almost come to the village, he saw a tall hay-wagon coming up the lane. There were two rich farmers on the seat, with stiff collars and thick vests and fat gold watch chains, and she was sitting between them and their arms were around her shoulders. The schoolmaster had begged a ride and was lying

on the hay behind the seat, and he had slyly managed to slide his arm around her waist.

Watching them from the middle of the road as the wagon slowly creaked nearer, my friend chuckled and shook his head, wondering how he could ever have been so blind as not to realize that she was the town harlot. Why, he had seen her a hundred times, drunken, clinging to some man's arm, hitching at her skirt, singing some maudlin song. Once she had bekoned to him. And it had never occurred to him that they were the same woman.

He laughed again, out loud this time and stepped forward boldly and stopped the horses.

The farmer who was driving got up unsteadily, jerking at the reins, and roared in a thick, tavern voice, 'Loafer! Good-for-nothing! Get out of our way!' And the whip came whistling down.

But my friend ducked and the lead horse reared. Then he grabbed the whip and pulled himself up on to the wagon with it, and the tipsy farmer down. The other farmer had found the bottle from which they had been swigging and was fetching it up for a blow, when he snatched it away from him and broke it over his head, so that the brandy drenched his pomaded hair and ran into his eyes. Then he tumbled him off into the road and laid the whip on to the horses until they broke into an awkward gallop which made up in jouncing what it otherwise lacked in speed.

When the fight started, the schoolmaster had tried to slip off the back of the wagon. Now he tried to hang on. But hay is not easy stuff to cling to. First his books went, then his tall hat, then he. There was a great brown splash. The last they saw of him, he was sitting in the puddle, his long legs spread.

By the time they reached the bridge, the horses were winded. My friend jumped nimbly out and swung her down. She seemed to be amused and perhaps even delighted at what was happening. Without any explanation, he took her firmly by the wrist and headed for the hills.

Every now and then he stole a glance at her. He began to marvel that he had ever thought her perfect. The dearest thing in the world, of course, but perfect?—why, she was much too cream-and-sugary, too sit-by-the-fire, too cozy and stodgy-respectable, almost plump. Well, he'd see to that, all right.

And he did. All through the long summer and into the tingling fall their life went like what he had always imagined must come after the happy endings of the fairy tales his grandmother had told him. He repaired the little old cabin in the hills beyond the upland pasture, and stuffed the old mattress with fresh green grass, and carved wooden dishes and goblets and spoons, and

made her a pail out of bark to fetch water. Sometimes he managed to filch from the outlying farms a loaf of new-made bread, sometimes some flour, sometimes only the grain, which she ground between stones and baked unleavened on another stone over the fire. He hunted rabbits and squirrels with his revolver, but occasionally he stole chickens and once he killed a sheep.

She went with him on his hunting expeditions, and once or twice they climbed into the crags, which seemed not at all cold and forbidding, as on that afternoon when he had walked with the Old Man. He made slim flutes out of willow wands, and they piped together in the evenings or out in the sunny forest. Sometimes, as a solemn jest, they wove twigs and flowers into wreaths as an offering to fancied forest gods. They played games with each other and with their pets—a squirrel who had escaped the pot and a brave young cat who had come venturing from the village.

True to my friend's expectations, his beloved grew brown, lithe, and quick. She went barefoot and tucked up her skirt. All signs of the village faded from her, and her grave, mysterious, sweet expression grew sparkingly alive, so that he sometimes shivered with pride when he looked at her. All day long she was with him, and he went to sleep holding her hand and in the morning it was always there.

He had only one worry, a trifling and indeed unreasonable one, since it was concerned with the absence rather than the presence of ill fortune, yet there it was. He could not understand why the farmers did not try to track him down for his thefts, and why the village folk had not done anything to him for taking their harlot.

He knew the people of the valley. He was not so credulous as to believe he had fooled them by hiding in the hills. Any poacher or thief who tried that had the dogs baying at his heels before morning. They were tight-fisted, those valley people. They never let anything out of their hands unless they made a profit. But what the profit could be in this case, he could not for the life of him determine.

In a small way it bothered him, and one night just before Hallowmas he woke with a start, all full of fear. Moonlight was streaming through the doorway. He felt her hand in his and for a moment that reassured him. But the hand felt cold and dry and when he tugged at it to waken her, it seemed weightless. He sprang out of bed and to the doorway and the hand came with him. In the moonlight he saw that it was a dead hand, severed at the wrist, well preserved, smelling faintly of spices.

He kicked the fire aflame and lit a candle from it. The cat was

pacing uneasily. Every now and then it would look toward the doorway and its fur would rise. The squirrel was huddled in a corner of its cage, trembling. My friend called his beloved's name, very softly at first, then more loudly. Then he shouted it with all the power of his lungs and plunged outside.

All night he searched and shouted in vain through the forest, striking at the inky branches as if they were in league with her captors. But when he returned at dawn, scratched and bruised, his clothes all smeared and torn, she was busy cooking breakfast. Her face, as she raised it to greet him, was tranquil and guiltless, and he found that he could not bring himself to question her or to refer in any way to the night's happenings. She bathed his cuts and dried his sweat and made him rest a little before eating, but only as if he had gone out for an early ramble and had had the misfortune to fall and hurt himself.

The cat was contentedly gnawing a bit of bacon rind and the squirrel was briskly chattering as it nibbled a large crumb. My friend searched surreptitiously for the dead hand where he had dropped it but it was gone.

All that day the sky was cloudless, but there was a blackness in the sunlight, as if he were dizzy and about to faint. He could not tire himself of looking at her. In the afternoon they made an expedition to the hilltop, but as he clasped her in his arms he saw, over her shoulder and framed by rich autumnal leaves, tinted by the distance, the figure of a man in a long black cloak and a broad-brimmed hat, standing high in the crags and seeming to observe them. And he wondered why the Old Man had stayed away from them so long.

That night she was very tender, as if she too knew that this night was the last, and it was hard for my friend to keep from speaking out. He lay with his eyes open the barest slit, feigning sleep. For a long time there was no movement in the cabin, only the comfortable sounds of night and her breathing. Then, very slowly, she sat up, and keeping hold of his hand, drew from under the bed a box. From this she took a small flute, which seemed, by the moon and flickering firelight, to be made not of willow but of a human bone. On this, stopping it only with three fingers, still keeping hold of his hand, she played a doleful and drowsy melody.

He felt a weight of sleep descend on him, but he had chewed a bitter leaf which induces wakefulness. After the tune was done, she held the flute over his heart and gently shook it. He knew that a little graveyard dust must have fallen from the stops, for he felt a second compelling urge of sleepiness.

Then she took from the box the severed hand and warmed it in her bosom. All this while he had the feeling that she suspected, was perhaps certain, that he was not asleep, but still carried out faithfully her ritual of precaution. After a long time, she gently eased her hand from his and placed the dead hand there and slipped out of bed and silently crossed to the doorway and went out.

He followed her. The whiteness of her smock in the moonlight made it easy. She went down the hill and across the upland pasture. It became apparent to him that she was heading for the village. She never once looked back. On the edge of the village she turned into a dark and narrow lane. He followed closer, stopping to avoid the shrubs that sometimes overhung the walls.

After circling halfway round the village, she opened a wicket and went through. Watching from the wicket, he could see that she was standing before a dark window in a low-roofed house. Faintly there came the sound of rapping. After a long time the window was opened. As she climbed over the sill she turned so that in the clear moonlight he caught a glimpse of her face. It was not the frozen and unearthly expression of a sleepwalker or one enchanted, not even the too gentle, too submissive expression of old days, but the new, sparkingly alive look that had only come with their summer together.

He recognized the house. It was the schoolmaster's.

Next morning the church bells were ringing as he strode back to the village, his revolver in his pocket. His steps were too long, and he held himself stiffly, like a drunkard. He did not turn into the circling lane, but went straight across the square. As he passed the open doors of the church, the bells had stopped and he could hear the voice of the preacher. Something about the tone of the voice made him climb the steps and peer in.

There was the smell of old woodwork and musty hangings, week-long imprisoned air. After the glaring sunlight, the piously inclined heads of the congregation seemed blurred and indistinct, sunk in stuffy gloom. But a shaft of rich amber fell full upon the pulpit and on her.

She was squeezed between the preacher and the carved front of the pulpit—rather tightly, for he could see how the wood, somewhat worn and whitened at that point by the repeated impress of fervent hands, indented her thigh under the skirt. The preacher's thin, long-chinned face, convulsed with oratory, was thrust over her shoulder, his blown spittle making a little cloud. With one hand the preacher pointed toward heaven, and with the other he was fondling her.

And on her face was that same shining, clear-eyed expression that he had seen there last night and that had seemed in the green forest caverns like the glance of some nymph new-released from evil enchantment, and that he knew his love alone had brought. With the amber light gilding her, he thought of how Aaron had made a Golden Calf for the Israelites to worship.

But had Aaron really made the Golden Calf, or had he stolen it? For the old words that the preacher mouthed had a new and thrilling ring to them, which could only come from her.

My friend groped sideways blindly, touched the back of a pew, steadied himself and screamed her name.

The floor of the church seemed to tilt and rock, and a great shadow swooped down, almost blotting out the frightened, backward turning faces of the congregation. She had slipped from the pulpit and was coming down the centre aisle toward him. He was holding out his hand to fend her off and dragging at his pocket for the revolver. The preacher had ducked out of sight.

She was very close to him now and her hands were lovingly outstretched and her expression was unchanged. He brought up the revolver, stumbling back, frantically motioning her to keep away. But she kept on coming and he fired all six charges into her body.

As the smarting grey smoke cleared, he saw her standing there unharmed. Someone was screaming 'Witch! Witch!' and he realized it was himself and that he was running across the square and out of the village.

Not until he ran himself out and the shock of terror passed, did the Old Man in Black fall into step with him. My friend was glad of the Old Man's presence, but he did not look too closely, for sidewise glances warned him that the cadaverousness had become extreme indeed, and that the cheeks were white as bone, and that for good reason there were no longer any wrinkles in the domelike forehead.

The Old Man did not speak, which was a kindness, and showed no signs of elation at his victory. Together they paced towards the distant crags. Down the road they passed the little cottage in which the philosopher lived, and the philosopher came out and stood watching them go by. He looked very shrivelled and dry and his hair was dusty, his clothes were old-fashioned and very tight. When they were almost past he raised his hand in a jerky salute and went inside and shut the door.

After a while they left the road and cut across the hills past the castle that stands at the head of the valley. On the battlements

was a tiny man who waved at them once with his cloak, very solemnly it seemed. At the foot of the crags they passed the cave where the bandit lived, and the bandit stood in the stony mouth and raised his gaudy cap to them in a grave, ironic greeting.

They were all day climbing the crags. By the time they reached the top, night had come. While his companion waited for him, my friend walked back to the crag's edge for a last look at the valley.

It was very dark. The moon had not yet risen. Beyond the village there was a great circle of tiny fires. He puzzled dully as to what caused them.

He felt thin hard fingers touch his shoulder and he heard the Old Man say, 'She isn't in the village any more, if that's what you're wondering. An army passed through the valley today. Those are the campfires you see in the distance. She's left the preacher, and the schoolmaster, as much as she ever leaves anyone. She's gone off with the soldiers.'

Then the Old Man sighed faintly and my friend felt a sudden chill, as if he had strayed to the margin of oblivion, and it seemed to him that a coldness had gone out from the Old Man and flowed across the whole valley and lapped up into the sky and made the very stars glittering points of ice.

He knew that there was only one creature in the whole world immune to that coldness.

So he lifted his hand to his shoulder and laid it on the smooth fingerbones there and said, 'I'm going back to her, Old Man. I know she'll never be true to me, and that she'll always yield herself eagerly to any mind with wit enough to imagine or learn a lie, and that whatever I give her she'll hurry to give to them, as a street woman to her bully. And I'm not doing this because I think she's carrying my child, for I believe she's sterile. And I know that while I grow old, she'll always stay young, and so I'm sure to lose her in the end. But that's just it, Old Man—you can't touch her. And besides, I've given myself to her, and she's beautiful, and however false, she's all there is in the world to be faithful to.'

And he started down the crags.

Old Nemecek leaned back and fingered his brandy glass, which he had not yet raised to his lips, and looked at me smilingly. I blinked at him dully. Then, as if finishing the story had been a signal, the beautiful girl came out of the bar, still on the arm of the young writer. She hesitated by our table and it seemed to me that the same cryptic look passed between her and old Nemecek as when she had come in. And because she was very beautiful and very young, and because the young writer was famous for

his idealism, I found myself shivering uncontrollably as I watched her walk toward the door.

'Here, drink your brandy,' said Nemecek, eyeing me solicitously.

'The girl,' I managed to say, 'The girl in the story—did she come to the New World?' I was still under the spell of the fairy tale to which I had been listening.

'Drink your brandy,' said Nemecek.

'And her lover,' I went on. She was gone now. 'That very close friend of yours. Was he really—?'

'The closest,' said Nemecek.

BROTHERS OF EARTH

C. J. Cherryh

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SF CHOICE 77

Edited by Mike Ashley

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